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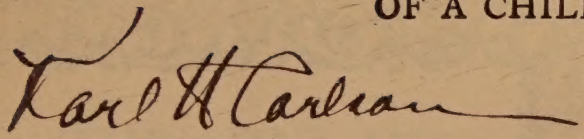

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THE SOUL OF A CHILD

by

EDWIN BJÖRKMAN

New York

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I

THE oldest part of Stockholm is a little rocky island. Once it was the whole city. Popularly it is still spoken of as "The City." At one end of it stands the huge square-cut pile of the Royal Palace, looking with solemn indifference toward the more modern quarters across the ever hurried waters of the North River. Nearer the centre, and at the very top of the island, lies an open place called Great Square, which used to play a most important part in Swedish history, but which now serves no better purpose than to house the open-air toy market that occurs the last week before Christmas.

Long narrow streets loop concentrically about Great Square. They are lined with massive structures of stone and brick, four and five stories high, that used to be the homes of court and government officials, of army and navy officers, of burghers made prosperous by an extensive domestic and foreign trade, while on the ground floors were located the choicest shops of the country's capital. The shops are still there, but they have grown dingy and cheap, and they administer only to the casual needs of the humble middle-class people crowded into the old-fashioned, gloomy apartments above.

From the square to the water-fronts radiate a number of still more narrow and squalid lanes, harbouring a population which is held inferior to that of the

streets in social rank without yet being willing to have itself classed with the manual toilers of the suburbs. Halfway down the slope of such a lane, and almost within the shadow of the palace, stood the house where Keith first arrived at some sort of consciousness of himself and the surrounding world.

On the fourth floor his parents occupied a three-room flat. The parlour and the living-room had two windows each, looking into the lane. The kitchen in the rear opened a single window on the narrowest, barest, darkest courtyard you ever saw, its one redeeming feature being a glimpse of sky above the red-tiled roof of the building opposite.

In such surroundings Keith spent the better part of his first sixteen years.

He was an only son, much loved, and one of his first conscious realizations was a sharp sense of restraint, as if he had been tied to a string by which he was pulled back as soon as anything promised to become interesting.

At first he thought the world made up entirely of those three rooms, where he, his parents, Granny—his maternal grandmother—and a more or less transient servant girl had lived for ever. Visitors drifted in, of course, but he seemed to think that they had come from nowhere and would return to the same place. What instilled the first idea of a wider outside world in his mind was leaning out through one of the front windows, with his mother's arm clutched tightly about his waist.

There was something symbolic in that clutch, for his mother was always full of fear that dire things would befall him. She was afraid of many other

things besides, and the need of being constantly worried was probably his second clear realization.

But the clasp of his mother's arm was soft and tender for all that. Her inclination to humour him in sundry respects not implying too much freedom of movement contrasted favourably with the sterner restraint exercised by his father. And so it was only natural that, to begin with, he should cling no less closely to her than she to him.

Leaning out of the front windows was one of the favourite pursuits of his earliest childhood, and during the summer it could be indulged to a reasonable extent.

Across the lane, not more than twenty-five feet distant, was another building, the upper parts of which he could see even when the windows were closed. It was much darker of aspect than their own house, and he knew that no people lived in it. He called it the distillery, just as he heard his parents do, without knowing what the word meant. Staring as he might into its dark windows, he could as a rule see nothing but the grimy panes, because in the back of it there was no courtyard at all—nothing but a solid wall without a single opening in it.

Now and then, however, he would spy the flickering light of an open-wick lamp move about on the floor level with their own. In the fitful, smoke-enshrouded glow of that lamp he would catch fleeting glimpses of clumsy figures and spooklike faces bending over huge round objects, while at the same time, if the windows were open, he would hear much mysterious tapping and knocking. It was all very puzzling and not quite pleasant, so that on midwinter afternoons, when he was still awake after dark, he would not care to look

very long at the house opposite, and the drawing of the shades came as an actual relief.

Letting his glance drop straight down from one of their windows, he saw, at a dizzying depth, the cobbles of the lane, lined on either side by a gutter made out of huge smooth stones. There was often water in the gutter even on dry days, when the intense blueness of the sky-strip overhead showed that the sun must be shining brightly. Sometimes the water was thick and beautifully coloured, and then he yearned to get down and put his hands into it. But to do so, he gathered from his mother, would not only be dangerous and contrary to her will and wish, but quite out of the question for some other reason that he could not grasp. His mother's standing expression for it was:

"No *nice* little boy would ever do that."

Keith's third realization in the way of self-consciousness was an uneasy doubt of his own inherent nicety, for he soon discovered that whatever was thus particularly forbidden seemed to himself particularly desirable.

At times he saw children playing down there—perhaps in the very gutter for which he was longing. To him they appeared entirely like himself, but to his mother's eye they were evidently objectionable in the same way as the gutter. There were not many of them, however, and it was a long time before two or three of them began to return with sufficient regularity to assume a distinct identity in his mind.

Older people came and went, but never many of them, and hardly ever more than one or two at a time. Nor did he care very much. More attractive was the sight of long, horse-drawn carts with narrow bodies

resting on two small wheels set about the centre. Generally they stopped in front of the distillery to load or unload heavy casks or barrels of varying size. The loading was more exciting by far, especially when the barrels were large, for then the men had to use all their strength to roll them up the gangway of two loose beams laid from the pavement to the cart, and to time their efforts they shouted or chanted noisily—much to Keith's joy and the disgust of his mother. On such occasions the air of the lane was apt to take on a special pungency, and as he sniffed it, he would have a sensation of mixed pleasure and revulsion. At other times, when the carts stopped in front of the warehouse below the distillery, odours of an exclusively enjoyable character would tickle his nostrils—odours that later he might encounter in their own kitchen and identify with matters pleasing to the palate as well as to the nose.

There were in all only eight houses on both sides of the lane. Four of these were the rear parts of the corner houses facing respectively on the Quay, at the foot of the lane, and on East Long Street, at its head. Beyond the latter there was nothing but another wall full of windows, just like the walls flanking the lane itself. The traffic on the street was more lively and varied, but there was not much about it to catch and hold his interest.

Almost invariably Keith turned his head in the other direction the moment he had poked it out of the window and been pulled back by his mother to a position of greater safety. There, at the foot of the lane, only a stone's throw distant, opened the stony expanse of the Quay, across which surged a veritable multitude

of men and animals and vehicles at all hours of the day. At the end of the Quay, silhouetted against blue or grey or green water, appeared commonly the blunt nose or the flag-draped stern of a big steamer but hardly ever the middle part of a hull with bridge or masts. And Keith could never recall whether the complete shape of a full-sized vessel was finally revealed to him by reality or by that reflection of it which, at an uncannily premature age, he began to find in books.

The main feature of the view, however—a sort of narrow Japanese panel where childish eyes perceived everything as on a flat surface—was that it continued upwards: first, a lot of water, ripped and curled by busily scurrying steam launches and tugs, streaked by plodding rowboats, and, at rare times, adorned by a white-sailed yacht; then, still higher up, a shore with many trees that drew the soul magnetically by their summer verdure; and, finally, a brightly red, toylike fort, crowned by a small embattled tower flying the blue and yellow Swedish flag at the top. Here was another world, indeed, larger and brighter by far, and more richly varied, than that of his home and the lane below and the dingy courtyard in the back.

So he began to ask questions, and one of the first things he learned, to his great astonishment, was that he had not always lived in the same place—that he had been born, whatever that meant, in another and unmistakably more desirable part of the city.

"But why did we come here," he asked, trying instinctively to keep his voice from sounding regretful or petulant.

"Because the bank owns this house," his mother replied. "And because papa acts as landlord for it, and we don't have to pay any rent here."

Out of this confusing answer he retained a single idea: the bank. It was in the home air, so to speak. Evidently his father was closely connected with it, and this was good for the whole family. For a little while the boy imagined that his father was the bank. Later he began to think of it as some sort of superlatively powerful being that, alone in the whole world, ranked above his father even. Still later—much later—he began to suspect a relationship between the bank and his father resembling that between his father and himself. And he read out of his father's words and miens a sense of dissatisfaction not unlike the one he felt when he was forced to do what he did not want, or prevented from doing what he wanted.

This was his fourth fundamental realization: of powers beyond those directly represented within the home; powers of compelling importance that might, or might not, be kindly; powers before which all and everything within his own narrow world had to bow down in helpless submission. In the end this one undoubtedly became the most significant of all his early realizations. It tended gradually to lessen his awe of parental authority so that, at a very early age, he developed the courage to shape his own life and opinions regardless of his immediate surroundings. At the same time, strange as it may seem, it inspired him with a general respect for established authority from which he could never quite free himself.

II

WHY don't I remember when we came here Keith asked his mother one day after s had let out the startling fact of his bei born elsewhere.

"Because it happened before you began to rememb things," she said a little warily.

As frequently was the case, her reply puzzled h more than the fact it was meant to explain, and so asked no more questions that time.

On the whole, he lived completely in the prese and rather on the edge nearest the future, so that teacher later said of him that he was in constant da ger of "falling off forward." Highstrung and re less, sitting still did not come naturally until he h learned to read books all by himself, and he cou hardly be called introspective. While prone to fut regrets, largely under the influence of his mothe morbid attitude, he gave little attention as a rule what was past and gone.

Here was an exception, however—something co cerning the past that stirred his curiosity powerfully and it became his first subject for brooding.

He could remember all sorts of things, of cour And it seemed that he had always remembered the Yet his mother was able to tell him things of wh

he knew nothing at all, although they had happened to himself. There might be any number of such things. What were they? Could he recall any of them by thinking hard enough?

When this problem laid hold of his mind he would retire to the corner between the big bureau and the right-hand window in the living-room, which, by formal conferment, was reserved for him as his own "play-room." The space in that nook was large enough to hold a small chair, a table to match, and a few toy boxes. There he would sit staring blindly at his toys until his mother anxiously inquired what was the matter with him.

The great question taking precedence of all the rest was: what was the very first thing he could remember?

With puckered brows and peering pupils he would send his gaze back into the misty past, and out of it emerged invariably the same image.

He saw himself seated on a small wooden horse fastened to a little platform with wheels under it. The horse was black with white spots, and possessed a nobly curved neck, a head with ears on top of it, and a pair of fiercely red nostrils.

The next thing recurring to his mind was a sense of swift, exhilarating movement. His father stood at one end of the living-room, his mother at the other, and the horse with himself on it was being pushed rapidly back and forth between them.

He could even hear his own joyous shouts as his father sent the horse careering across the floor by an extra strong push. The general impression left behind by the whole scene was one of happiness so acute that nothing else in his life compared with it.

Was it a real memory? If so, when did it happen? And what had become of the horse?

Finally the pressure from within became too strong and he blurted out the whole story to his mother in order to make sure of what it meant.

"You never had a horse large enough to sit on," she declared emphatically.

"You have been dreaming, child," Granny put in.

"What would the neighbours below have said," his mother continued. "And the rag carpets on the floor would have caught the wheels, anyhow."

Removing the rag carpets except for purposes of cleaning was one of the unforgivable sins, by the bye.

"And it isn't like your father either," Granny added after a while, not without a suggestion of bitterness in her voice.

"Carl is always tired when he comes home," Keith's mother rejoined in a tone that put an end to further discussion.

Granny's point made an impression on Keith's mind nevertheless. As far as he could actually remember, his father had on no occasion showed such a jolly spirit or done anything that could be used as basis for a belief in that one questionable recollection.

At all times of the day Keith was enjoined to keep quiet—because his mother was not well, or because of the neighbours, or just because "nice children should not make a noise"—but it was only after his father's return home that these injunctions must be taken quite seriously. The father's appearance brought an instantaneous change in the atmosphere of the place, and the boy strove instinctly to be as little noticeable as possible. If his mercurial temperament lured him

into temporary forgetfulness, a single stern word from the father sent him back into silence and the refuge of his own corner—or into bed.

But the more he considered and conceded the unlikeliness of the scene projected by some part of his mind with such persistency, the more passionately he craved it to be a real memory of something that had really happened to himself.

Perhaps it was merely a dream, as Granny had suggested. Perhaps it was something he had wished. . . .

Anyhow, he did wish that his father would let him come a little closer to himself at times—not in the same way as his mother did, but as he did in the dream —or whatever it was. . . .

Once more he fell into a deep study of when he had begun to remember so hard that he could still remember it. Out of this he was awakened by his mother's voice:

"What *is* the matter, Keith?"

"I don't know what to play," he replied out of policy, as it might bring him something either in the way of a diversion or a treat. There were still some of mother's delectable ginger snaps left over from the Christmas baking.

"Your soldiers are right in front of you," his mother said in a voice holding out no hope.

So Keith returned to the tin soldiers that were his most cherished toys—perhaps because they drew fewer protests from above than anything else, as being least conductive to outbursts of youthful vivacity. Judging by the earnest attention with which he manœuvred them on his own little table or, in moments of special dispensation, on the collapsible dining table placed

against the wall between the two windows in the living-room, he ought to have ended as a general.

III

ALL through his life Keith retained a queer inclination to arrange furniture very precisely at right angles to the wall and as close to it as possible. It was a direct outcome of his first and most deeply rooted impressions, received in that parental living-room, where every inch of space had been carefully calculated, and where the smallest nook was filled by a chair, or a footstool, or some other minor object. In later years he often wondered how a single room of modest proportions could hold so much of furniture and of life.

It was bedroom and study, dining-room and nursery, workroom and parlour. There the morning toilet was made, and there his first lessons were learned. There the father did his reading, of which he was very fond, and there the mother sewed, darned, embroidered, wrote letters, gave household orders, told fairy tales, and received visitors. There the simple daily meals were served for all but Granny, who clung obstinately to the kitchen, and there friends were feasted and cards played at nameday and birthday parties. And there three people slept every night.

Of course, excursions could be made, particularly to the kitchen where Granny was always restlessly waiting for "one more kiss," and once in a great while to the

"best room" which mostly was occupied by some stranger whose small weekly rent paid the servant's wages. But to the living-room one always returned in the end, and during his first years this narrow confinement did not strike Keith as a hardship.

The room seemed quite large to him at that time, with distances and vistas and diversions sufficient for his childish fancy. It was a pleasant room, with brightly striped rag carpets on the floor and two pretty large windows framed by snow-white lace curtains. Crammed as it was with objects needed for its many different uses, it was always kept in a state of the most scrupulous order and instant disaster followed any attempt at a disarrangement.

It was a whole world by itself, full of interesting things for a small boy to puzzle over. It was also a world in evolution. Every so often a piece of furniture would disappear and a better one take its place, to be studied and admired and tried out again and again. Back of every improvement lay a unifying ambition. Its key-word was mahogany. The superior social respectability of this wood could not be disputed, and it had a sort of natural dignity that harmonized with the father's solid taste—though the mother might have preferred something lighter and brighter. And a microcosm of mahogany might, after all, be worth living for when loftier illusions had gone on the scrap heap.

Practically everything in the room had a history as well as a special place. There was the main chest of drawers, for instance, known as "mamma's bureau" and placed near one of the windows, where a good light fell on the swinging mirror forming a separate

piece on top of it. A journeyman carpenter had made that chest to prove himself a master of his trade under the old gild rules. Then he put it up at lottery to raise money with which to open a shop of his own. Keith's father bought a lot while still engaged, and won the prize which became the chief wedding present of his bride—to be cherished above all other objects to her dying day.

It was really a fine piece of work, of mahogany, with daintily carved and twisted columns along the front corners, and so highly polished that Keith could see his own face in the rich brown glimmer of its surfaces. It had four drawers. The three lower ones were divided between the parents and held all sorts of things, from shirts and socks to mother's mahogany yard stick, which had a turned handle and a tapering blade that made it pass excellent muster as a sword. The top drawer could only be pulled out halfway, but then the front of it came down, and it changed into a writing desk, with an intriguing array of small drawers and pigeonholes at the back of it, and a suspicion of alluring and unattainable treasures in every separate receptacle. To ransack all of these was Keith's most audacious dream, but when the dream came true at last, it was fraught with no ecstasy of realization, for he was a middle-aged man, and in the room behind him his mother lay dead. . . .

The mirror was flanked by two small square mahogany boxes, one holding medicines and the other tobacco. Little mats, some crocheted and some wonderfully composed of differently coloured glass beads, were used to protect the boxes as well as the top of

the bureau from being scratched, and on them stood several small groups and figures of porcelain. One of these was Keith's special favourite and his first introduction to that world where beauty takes precedence of goodness and truth. It showed a lady and a gentleman in dresses of a colour and cut wholly unlike anything seen by Keith on the real persons coming within his ken. They were seated on a richly ornamented sofa before a tea table, and there was something about the manner in which they looked at each other that spoke more loudly than their bright costumes of things lying beyond ordinary existence.

There was also a nice little girl with a doll viewing herself complacently in a real mirror, and a lady in bloomers, apparently of Oriental pattern, who rowed a boat hardly larger than herself, that was raised almost on end by terrific waves. All three groups had this in common, that when you removed the ornamental upper part, a previously unsuspected inkstand was revealed. There was a period when Keith seriously believed that all specimens of the keramic art were inkstands in disguise.

Art was not represented on the bureau alone, however. The walls contained a number of steel engravings in gilt frames, quaint old coloured prints, family photographs, and pink-coloured reliefs of various Swedish kings made out of wax and mounted under convex glass panes on highly polished black boards. But all of those objects were flat and distant and colourless in comparison with the things on the bureau that could be touched as well as seen. As for the group with the lady and the gentlemen, it had only one

rival in the boy's mind, and that was the big clock in a wooden case that hung on the wall between the windows over the dining table. The hide-and-seek of the restless pendulum with its shining brass disc was a constant source of fascination in itself, and so were the strange operations performed by the father in front of the clock every Sunday morning, when diversions were particularly welcome on account of the extra restrictions on play. But its main charm rested in the strangely pleasing sounds it produced every so often, preceded by a funny rattle that warned small folk and big of what was going to happen. It was Keith's first acquaintance with music.

The parents' bed occupied the centre of the right-hand wall, between mamma's bureau and another chest of drawers known as "Granny's bureau." It was all wood and made in two parts that slid into each other, reducing the daytime width of the bed by one-half. It stood parallel to the wall, instead of at right angles, and the extension took place sideways. At night it looked like an ordinary double bed. In the day it almost disappeared beneath a rectangular pile of bedclothing, covered by a snow-white spread that was pulled and smoothed and tucked until it hung straight as a wall.

Granny's bureau, old-fashioned and clumsy, but made of some native wood that glimmered like gold, was largely devoted to linen ware for bed and table. At the top it had two small drawers instead of a long, and one of these constituted the first storage place set aside for Keith's special use. His impression was that it had always been his, and once he asked his mother if it really had been his before he was born.

"Of course it was," she said with a sly smile, "but we took the liberty to use it for other purposes until you arrived."

At first glance this seemed quite reasonable to Keith, though nothing to smile at so far as he could see. Later he became conscious of a vague sense of annoyance. It would have been more pleasant if no one else had ever used that drawer.

Across the room from Granny's bureau, in the corner just inside the door to the kitchen, towered the characteristic Swedish oven—a round column of white glazed bricks, with highly polished brass shutters in front of the small cubical fire-place, where nothing but birchwood was burned. In the narrow crack between the oven and the wall rested always a birch rod, which was often referred to at critical moments. A new rod, with brightly coloured feathers attached to the tip of every twig, appeared regularly on Shrove Tuesday and tended slightly to spoil that otherwise glorious day, when large cross buns stuffed with a mixture of crushed almond and sugar were served in hot milk for dinner. Though the rod was little more than a symbol of family discipline, Keith always disliked its presence as a threat to his dignity if not to his hide.

A double washstand, looking like a document chest in the daytime, the chaiselongue on which Keith slept at night, and the door to the best room occupied all the rest of that wall except a corner by the window, where stood his mother's high-backed easy chair, with her little work-table beside it and a hassock in front of it. To that chair she would retire whenever her household duties permitted, and thither Keith would be drawn even more powerfully than to his own "play-

room" at the opposite corner—especially when his mother seemed in a happy mood. There he would kneel on the hassock, with his head in her lap, and if he could think of nothing else, he would say:

"Tell me about the time you were in London."

IV

WHILE still in her early twenties, Keith's mother had spent two years with an English family living in Sweden. She always described her position as that of "lady companion" to the mistress of the house. As a little boy, Keith did not know enough to ask any embarrassing questions. Having learned more of life, he began to suspect that his mother's place might have been little better than that of a servant, and the thought of it made his soul shrink and wither.

When the family moved back to England, Keith's mother went along and spent a whole year in London. It was her great adventure, the phase of her past of which she spoke most eagerly and lovingly. She had formed a passionate liking for the English language, of which she had picked up a good deal, as well as for English character and English manners. She never tired of telling about the great city of London, and Keith never tired of listening.

"I was so homesick when I first got there," she would say, "that I cried day and night. Then, one night, I heard a cat mewing on the roof outside my

window. It was the first Swedish sound I had heard since I came to England, and after that I felt much better."

"Why didn't you stay," asked Keith.

"Because then there would have been no little Keith," she explained, her face lighting up with the kind of grown-up smile that always provoked and perplexed the boy.

"Are there no boys in England," he persisted.

"Yes, plenty of them, and fine ones at that. But I wanted no one but you, and you were here, and so I had to come back to get you."

"Here," he repeated. "Where here?"

"In Sweden, of course," his mother rejoined, and then she started hurriedly to describe the wonders of London shopping.

"But why did you go at all," he interrupted after listening a while to what seemed less interesting to him than certain other points. "I might have been lost while you were away."

"You might," she assented, "but I had to take the risk because I had to get a name for you and I could never have found the one you have in Sweden."

"Why not?"

"Because it is English. And it should be pronounced *Keeth* instead of *Kite* as they say here. I found it in a book over there, and I fell in love with it the moment I saw it, and I made up my mind that if I ever had a boy, that would be his name."

"*If* you had a boy," Keith took her up. "But you knew I was here?"

"Of course, I knew," said his mother in the tone that always warned him that a change of occupation

would be in order. "Run along and play in your own corner now. I must get some work done."

At other times, when the talk didn't drift off into dangerous by-paths, his mother would tell little anecdotes in English learned from her former mistress, and generally end up by singing a little song about a ball—probably one that had something to do with cricket. And Keith would exultantly repeat the last line, which was the only one he could remember:

"And then she *popped,* and then she died."

It was the word *popped* that caught his fancy, partly because it was so funny in itself, and partly because it had to be uttered with a sort of explosion on a very high note. As far as his rendering of the rest was concerned—well, it was early discovered and reluctantly admitted that, like his father, he could not even sing "Old Man Noah," which is the simplest melody imaginable to a musical mind in Sweden.

His failure in this respect gave his mother a slight pang every time it was brought home to her, although she made fun of it and pretended she didn't care. Music had been her young heart's dream. It was the only art for which she showed a genuine regard. And two of her pet grievances were that she didn't have a piano, and that, if she had one, she could not play on it.

But his father used to say that the only instrument he cared to hear was a drum.

VI

HIS mother's chief grievance was her health. She was rarely quite well, and they had a family physician who would appear from time to time without being sent for. Yet her illness seemed, as a rule, not to prevent her from being about and attending to her household duties.

Once, however, while Keith was still too small to receive clear impressions, she had to keep in bed for a long time, and during much of that time she seemed to have forgotten him entirely. The father was more taciturn and reserved than usual, and even the boy could see that he was worried. Friends and relatives came and went with a quite uncommon frequency, and all of them spoke to Keith in a strange manner that, although not unpleasant, had a tendency to make him choke. A hundred times a day he was told that he must keep quiet for his mother's sake, and that it was no time for boisterous playing—if he really must play at all. Most of the time he was in the kitchen, and on a few occasions he was even permitted to stay all by himself in the parlour, where there were all sorts of big books with any number of pictures on the fine oval table standing in front of an old sofa so huge that to crawl up on its seat was almost like going off into another room.

Finally he was taken to the home of Aunt Brita, his

father's married sister, in another part of the town and kept there, a bewildered prisoner in a strange land, until one day his aunt told him that his mother was well and wanted him to come home, but that he would have to be a more than usually good boy for a long time yet, unless he wanted to lose his mother forever.

When, at last, he was home again, his mother pulled him up to herself in the bed, embraced him passionately and sobbed as if it had been a farewell instead of a greeting. He wept, too, and clung to his mother as if in fright, while she told him that he must always do just what she told him and, above all, not scare her by going off so that she did not know where he was.

The father stood beside the bed watching them. And as Keith happened to look up once, he saw that his father's eyes were moist with tears. The boy could hardly believe it, and a little later he wondered whether he had been mistaken, for his father spoke just then in his sternest tone, and all he said was:

"Yes, I hope you will behave a little better after this than you have done before."

Many more weeks went before his mother was herself again. Even then a difference remained. She was more given to worry than before and clung to husband and child with a concern that frequently became oppressive.

Then, one fine day, she was all gay and smiling again, and bustled about the home with new eagerness, and told Keith a lot of things about England, and once actually danced across the floor while he was vainly trying to keep step with her. And the father tried hard to look his grouchiest when he returned home

that night, but failed. And Keith was allowed to stay up quite late, and when he was in bed at last, and almost asleep, he thought he saw his father in the big easy chair by the window, with the mother seated on his lap kissing him. And just as he was dropping off, he heard, as if in a dream, his father's voice saying:

"Look out! I think the Crown Prince is still awake!"

VI

SOME persons said that Keith looked like his father, others that he was the very image of his mother.

"He has my light hair and Carl's brown eyes," said his mother often when that topic was under discussion, and saying it seemed to make her happy.

"As a baby he was so pretty that people would stop us on the street to ask whose child he was," Granny might put in, if she happened to be within hearing. Then she would add with a glance at Keith: "But that is all gone now."

Keith himself never gave much thought to his looks, but any comparison with his mother struck him as quite foolish.

He liked to look at her, especially at her hair, which was very plentiful and in colour like beaten copper with glints of gold in it. Her skin was very fair and soft as the softest velvet. Her eyes were blue, and in bright moments they had the softness of the sky of a

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Swedish summer night. But when the clouds of depression closed in upon her, they grew pale and lightless and disturbingly furtive, so that Keith's glance found it hard to meet them.

Her gaiety sparkled when she was herself, and she had a passionate love of everything that was bright and pleasant. Once she had always been that way; and at times she would tell Keith what a wonderful time she had as a girl, and how she used to be the centre and inspiration of every social gathering in which she took part. She had a quick mind, too, and a heart full of impulsive generosity. But from one extreme she would go to another, so that, when the dark moments came, she would even regret kindnesses conferred while the sun was still shining. In such moments she would sometimes speak to the boy of her ailment as if he were in some mysterious way responsible for it.

Yet she loved the boy to distraction and became filled with unreasoning anxiety the moment he was out of sight. Her attitude toward her husband was the same. He could never leave the home or return to it without being kissed. The moment he was outside the kitchen door, she hastened to the window and leaned out of it so that she might watch him until he vanished about the corner at the head of the lane. And there she generally lay waiting for him when he came home. If he was late, which happened almost every day, she would be the victim of a thousand fears as she made more and more frequent trips between the kitchen and the living-room window. When he finally came, she acted as if she had not seen him for months,

while he pretended to be more or less bored by her attentions.

But there were moments, too, when her tenderness flared into startling outbursts of bleak, cutting anger, giving way in the end to floods of hysterical tears. A couple of such tempests formed part of Keith's earliest reliable memories.

VII

AS a rule Keith slept far too soundly to be aroused by anything. One night, however, there was so much loud talking in the room that he woke up completely. For a while he lay quite still, but with wide-open eyes and ears.

The big lamp had been placed on the washstand back of the chaiselongue on which he was lying, evidently in order to prevent its light from falling on his face.

His mother was seated, fully dressed, on the edge of the bed across the room. Her face was white as snow. Her eyes blazed with a sort of cold fire. Her whole body seemed to tremble with a feeling so tense that she could not find words for it.

The father was leaning far backwards on an ordinary chair, with his outstretched right arm resting on the dining table. His face was flushed and the thick fringe of black hair about the bald top of his head was slightly disordered. He tried to smile, but

the smile turned into a grin. When he spoke, his voice was a little thick.

"I can't keep entirely away from my comrades." he said. "They think already that I am too stuck up to associate with them. I haven't been out for two weeks. I haven't had a drop more tonight than I can stand. And it isn't twelve o'clock yet."

All of a sudden Keith saw the cold, angry light go out of his mother's eyes. Her face twisted convulsively. She sank into a heap on the bed, sobbing as if her heart would break then and there.

"Carl," she screamed between two sobs. "You'll kill me if you talk like that to me!"

"Like that," he repeated in a stunned toneless voice. Then his face flushed almost purple. A hard look came into his eyes, and he rose so abruptly that the chair upset behind him. At the same time he brought down his fist with such violence that the table nearly toppled over.

"I'll be damned if I stand this kind of thing one moment longer," he shouted hoarsely.

But even as he spoke, his eyes fell on the boy. As if by magic, his self-control returned.

"The boy is awake," he said in his usual tone of stern reserve.

There was a moment's silence. A few more sobs came from the mother. Then she sat up, wiped her eyes, and spoke in a tone that was almost calm:

"Go to sleep again, Keith. Your father and I were merely talking about some things that you don't understand yet."

When she saw that the boy was crying, she came over to him, kneeled down beside him and put her arms

about him. Soon her kisses and her soothing words had their wonted effect, and he dropped off once more into the deep, deathlike slumber of childhood.

The air remained tense in the household for several days, but nothing further happened until one night when the father arrived a little later than usual from his work, looking just as he did the night of the quarrel. Again his speech was a little thick, and the mother's face assumed an ominous look. She said nothing about what was nearest her heart, however, but started instead to complain of some petty disobedience on the part of Keith.

"If you spanked him a little more and humoured him a little less, he would obey more readily," said the father.

His words carried no particular menace, and there seemed no reason why the boy should be scared. But perhaps there was something else in the atmosphere that affected his sensitive nerves and sent him unexpectedly into a paroxysm of weeping.

"Stop it," cried his father dark with sudden anger. "Stop it, I tell you."

"You leave the boy alone," cried the mother, her face as white as the father's was red.

"We'll see whether he'll obey or not!"

As he spoke, the father sat down on the nearest chair, picked up the boy and put him face down across his knees.

Keith's heart seemed to stop. He even ceased weeping. Then he heard his mother cry out:

"If you touch the boy, I'll throw myself out of the window!"

"Oh, hell!" came back from the father. With that

he half dropped and half flung the boy to the floor, so that the latter rolled across the room and landed under the chaiselongue.

There Keith lay, still as a mouse, until he was pulled out by his mother. He didn't begin to cry again, and he was no longer scared or upset. A few moments later he was undressing and going to bed as if nothing had happened.

Another week had hardly passed, when Keith was waked up again at night, but this time by a noise as if the house was falling. As he sat up in bed, staring wildly about him, his nostrils became filled with a smell that was quite new to him. It was like smoke, but more pungent.

The living-room was dark, but the door to the parlour stood open, and light came through it. Not a sound could be heard for a few moments.

Then his mother came running into the room and flung herself on her knees beside the chaiselongue.

"Oh, my boy, my boy, my boy!" she cried over and over again as she pressed Keith to her breast, rocking him back and forth.

A few seconds later the father also came in carrying the lamp in one hand. Having put it on the dining table, he dropped down on a chair as if too exhausted to stand up.

His face showed a pallor quite strange to it and for the first and only time in his life Keith thought that his father looked scared.

"Don't, Anna," the father said after a while, sitting up straight on the chair. "It's all right now—"

Then a thought or a memory seemed to recur to him, and he said in a voice that nearly broke:

"God, but it was a close call for both of us! And if it had happened to you, I would have followed you on the spot!"

"Carl, Carl!" cried the mother, letting Keith go and throwing her arms about her husband instead. "What would have become of Keith?"

It was the first time the boy was taken into his parents' confidence to some extent. He was still too young to grasp all the implications, but the main facts were plain enough even to him.

The parlour was rented as usual, but the man occupying it was not at home. The parents had gone in there together on some errand. Seeing a small pistol hanging on the wall above the big sofa, the father took it down and began to play with it, never for a moment suspecting it of being loaded.

First he pointed it at himself, then at Keith's mother. Each time he was about to pull the trigger, and each time something seemed to hold him back. Finally he turned the weapon toward the wall and pressed down with his finger. As he did so, the shot rang out that waked the boy.

The next day Keith was permitted to examine the mark made by the bullet in the wall. It was all very exciting. But the final result of that incident was as unforeseen as the shot itself.

The whole affair evidently made a deep impression on Keith's father. He ceased almost completely to go out by himself at night. In fact he became so averse to leaving his home that it was hard to get him out when the mother wanted him to go. And never again did Keith hear his parents quarrel openly.

But now and then when his father came home from

work, Keith would notice that same slight thickness of speech which had forced itself on his attention on two extraordinary occasions.

He was a man himself before he realized what that thickness signified in his father's life.

VIII

"OH, mamma, you mustn't!" cried Keith's mother one day when she came out into the kitchen and found the boy munching a slice of white bread with butter on it.

"He likes it so much," replied Granny easily.

"But you know what Carl has said," the mother rejoined rather impatiently. "He'll find out sooner or later if you disregard it, and then he'll be furious."

"So he will anyhow," muttered Granny.

"Mamma!" protested the mother. "It's for the boy's own good. He should only eat hard bread except on Sundays and when we have company. It is so much better for his teeth. And it makes him stronger, too. You want to be big and strong, don't you, Keith?"

"It's a wonder his father lets him have anything at all to eat," Granny put in before Keith had a chance to answer.

"You must not talk like that, mamma," said the mother sharply. "Least of all when the boy hears it." Then she turned to Keith again: "Don't you believe what Granny says. Your father is merely thinking of

what is good for you. He loves you just as much as I do—or your grandmother. But he thinks we are spoiling you. And he wants you to grow up and be a real man. That's why he hates to see you cry."

There was a pause while Keith pondered the matter—not seriously concerned on the whole, as long as his tidbit was not taken away from him.

"Don't you love your father," his mother asked suddenly.

"Ye-es," Keith answered mechanically.

Then he began to ponder again. His feelings toward his father were far too complicated for utterance. They seemed to have nothing whatsoever to do with love, if that was what he felt for his mother. There was undoubtedly a great deal of fear in his attitude toward the father, and also resentment that at times would flare into something bordering on hatred. But this attitude was combined with a lot of respect, not to say admiration. At times it would also be tinged with a longing that he could not explain or express. And if ever the father gave him the slightest evidence of friendliness, he would be thrown into a rapture of happiness that nothing done by his mother could equal.

He adored his mother, and clung to her, and relied on her, and wheedled her, but it was an open question whether, at heart, he felt any particular respect for her—although he was quite proud of certain things about her. And as for Granny, whom, in a way, he loved more than anybody else, because she petted him and indulged his slightest whims, there could simply be no talk about respecting her. Even Keith realized vaguely that she was not in the respected class.

His father was, on the other hand. There could be no doubt about that. If he had only been willing to unbend a little now and then. . . .

IX

THE kitchen had other attractions than Granny, though she ranked foremost.

As Keith came out from the living-room, he had on his right the huge, old-fashioned fire-place—a regular fortress of brick, with a modern cook stove of iron set into one corner of it. It was entirely covered by a smoke-hood of painted metal sheeting, with a flange on its outside edge along which were placed a number of lids.

On his left was a set of shelves filled from top to bottom with pots and pans and kettles of every possible size and shape, including a cauldron so huge and heavy that it took two people to get it out with ease from its place on the bottom shelf. An overwhelming majority of these utensils were of copper and so highly polished that they shone like suns setting through a fog bank. Some of them made good toys, but "things for use are not for play" was an old maxim often quoted by both parents and grudgingly repeated by Granny herself.

A big sofa, in which the grandmother slept at night, stood along the centre of the wall on the left. The corner beyond held a wall-fast cupboard so large that it looked like a closet built into the room. It served

both as pantry and buffet, and was full of things tempting to a young palate.

In the opposite corner, beyond the window and right by the outside door, stood an open water barrel holding about twenty gallons. There was no running water above the ground floor. Every drop had to be carried three flights of stairs from the courtyard. What was needed for drinking and cooking was kept in a copper can, two feet high, with a lid on top and a spout in front that made it look like a badly overgrown tea kettle. Water for all other uses had to come out of the barrel. To keep both vessels filled was a heavy task, and waste of water was regarded as little short of a crime. The sacredness of the barrel and its contents was a mystery to Keith until he grew old enough to do some of the carrying. Then he began to understand.

Most of the water went to the stove, where operations of one kind or another were carried on from morning till night, tempting the boy with their mysteries or their promises. In the uppermost corner of the hood was a square opening covered by an iron lid. When the lid was down and you crawled right up into the fire-place, you could see the sky through the chimney.

One day, when Keith had sneaked into the kitchen uninvited, he noticed something unusual going on in the fire-place. All the paraphernalia had been cleared away. The lid was open, and from the chimney issued strange noises. Then soot began to fall in masses, and finally appeared a pair of human feet, quite bare and all black.

It was very funny and very disconcerting. Keith watched with bulging eyes and trembling heart, until at

last a whole big man came out of the chimney. As he crouched for a moment on the fire-place before getting down on the floor, he turned on Keith a pair of eyes that seemed to be all white and big as moons.

At that moment fear got the better of curiosity, and Keith made haste to bury his face in Granny's lap.

"Yes, Keith had better look out," grinned the servant girl, "for the chimney sweep takes all bad little boys."

"I'll take you, if you talk like that," the black figure in the fire-place shot back at her.

The tone of his voice made Keith steal another glance at him. The white eyes shone right at him in a rather friendly fashion, and further down a huge red slit in the black face framed two rows of teeth no less white than the eyes. Keith guessed that the dark visitor from the chimney was smiling at him in a fashion that seemed to bode no harm.

In another minute the man was gone, and Keith hurried back to the living-room to ask a question of his mother:

"Could he really take me?"

"Not unless we gave him leave," she replied. "But sometimes, when little boys are very, *very* bad, their parents turn them over to the sweep as apprentices, because they are not good for anything else."

Keith thought long and hard.

"I ain't bad," he declared at last.

"Not exactly," his mother remarked diplomatically. "But you could be a great deal better. What were you doing in the kitchen just now? I have told you not to run out there all the time. Lena does not like you to get in her way, you know."

"But Granny is there," Keith protested.

"Yes, of course, and you must be nice to her, but. . . ."

As his mother did not go on, Keith asked:

"Why does Granny always stay in the kitchen?"

"Because she wants to," his mother answered.

"But why does she want to?"

"It is her way—a sort of pride she has. And I have long ago given up trying to persuade her."

Her tone indicated clearly that further discussion of the subject was not desirable.

X

KEITH was playing in his own corner that very evening, trying to keep as quiet as possible while his father had an unusually late dinner. His mother had gone out into the kitchen a few moments earlier. Thence she returned suddenly with a half empty bottle in her hand and a look of extreme annoyance on her face.

"Carl," she said, "look what I just found in a corner of the cupboard."

"Humph," the father grunted with a sideglance at the bottle. "Ours is locked up, is it not?"

"Yes, but that is neither here nor there. She would rather die, she says, than touch a drop of ours."

"Where does she get it?"

"I can't make it out. Somebody must bring it in,

of course. I fear it is Mrs. Karlgren, and I am simply going to tell her to keep away hereafter. The idea of her coming here practically begging, and then doing such a thing, after all I have done for her!"

"But you are not sure," the father objected earnestly, and Keith paid special notice to his objection because he had already learned, or divined, that his father could not bear the sight of the poor woman in question.

"No, it is impossible to be sure," the mother admitted. Then she added after a pause: "What puzzles me more than anything else is where she gets the money."

Though no name was mentioned, Keith knew perfectly well that they were speaking of Granny. And he recalled having laughed at her in the kitchen earlier in the evening before the father came home. Her eyes had a funny look and seemed a little inflamed. Her still thick braids were loosened and about to come entirely undone. She was talking more than usual, and in a tone that suggested defiance.

As he recalled all this, Keith forgot to listen to his parents, who went on discussing so intently that he was able to leave his corner and reach the door to the kitchen unnoticed. An irresistible desire to see Granny at once had seized him. Back of it lay a vaguely sensed mixture of curiosity and sympathy.

Granny was in her favourite place beside the kitchen sofa, seated on a foot-stool almost as large as an ordinary chair, but somewhat lower. That stool was the one bone of contention between her and Keith, because he was carrying it off as often as he could get at it. Turned upside down, with Keith seated snugly be-

tween its four legs, it became a sleigh drawn across icy plains by a team of swift reindeer, or a ship rocking mightily on the high seas.

The kitchen was full of a peculiar sweetish smell, by which Keith knew without looking that Granny was dressing the old wound on her left leg that had developed "the rose" and would not heal. She was leaning far over, busy with a bandage which she wound tightly about her leg, from the ankle to the knee. The boy sniffed the familiar smell with a vague sense of discomfort, which, however, did not prevent him from going up to the grandmother and putting one arm about her neck.

"Old hurt is hard to mend," she muttered quoting one of the old saws always on her lips. Then without raising her head, she added in the peevish, truculent tone of a thwarted child: "You had better go back in there before they come and get you. I am nothing but a servant, and as such I know my place and keep it. I am less than a servant, for they wouldn't dare do to Lena what they do to me."

"Oh, yes, they would," Lena put in from across the room. "And they would have a right, too."

As if she had not heard at all, Granny sat up straight and looked hard at the boy.

"Whatever you do, Keith," she said, and he noticed that her voice sounded a little strange, "see that you make a lot of money when you grow up. To be poor is to have no rights, and the worst thing of all is to be dependent on others, no matter how near they are to you."

"I think Mrs. Carlsson is very ungrateful," said Lena, "There are thousands of old people who would

give anything to have a nice home and nothing to worry over."

"Anybody can talk, but it takes a head to keep silent," said Granny impersonally, quoting another old saw. Then her manner changed abruptly and she turned to Keith effusively.

"Give me a kiss! You love your old Granny, don't you? You don't despise her, do you, because she has nothing and is nothing? And you can be sure she loves you more than anybody else."

The boy's feelings were so mixed that he really could not feel anything at all. His arm was still about the grandmother's neck, and mechanically he gave her the kiss she asked for, but it was with real relief he saw his mother open the door to the living-room and responded to her demand that he go to bed at once.

XI

HARDLY any memory left behind by Keith's childhood was more acute than the image of Granny seated in the centre of the kitchen, her stolid, yet pleasant old face bent over some household task, and her whole figure instinct with a passive protest against her enforced dependency or, maybe, against life's arbitrariness in general. One moment she seemed to be brooding deeply, and the next she looked as if there was not a thought in her head. For one reason or another, her anomalous position and peculiar attitude occupied Keith's mind a great deal,

and many of the questions with which he plied his mother were concerned with Granny. They were fairly discreet as a rule, but on the morning after the scene just described, some impulse of which he had no clear understanding made him perplex his mother with the abrupt question:

"Why does Granny drink?"

They were alone in the living-room at the time, she seated in her big easy chair by the window and he, as usual, kneeling on the hassock at her feet.

She looked up at him with as much surprise as if he had hit her viciously. A deeper red flowed into her cheeks that kept their soft pinkness even when she was thought at death's door and lost it only under the pressure of extreme anger.

At the same time a look came into her eyes that gave Keith a momentary scare. It was only a flash, however, and changed quickly into something like the helplessness that used to characterize her glance in moments of heavy depression. Her voice trembled a little as she spoke:

"Because Granny's life has been very hard, and not very happy."

"Tell me about it," urged the boy.

There was a long pause during which he watched his mother's face closely. Gradually its expression changed into one of resignation, and then into determination, as if she had made up her mind to be done once for all with a task that could not be avoided indefinitely. It was a long story she told, at first hesitatingly, then with an eagerness that betrayed an awakening purpose. Everything she said stuck deeply in the boy's mind, and whenever he thought of Granny's life

afterwards, he had the impression of having learned all about it at that one time, although the likelihood is that many details were picked up by degrees and dovetailed into the memory of that first narrative as integral parts of it.

"Your grandmother was not born to be a servant," his mother began. "She was a rich man's daughter, and there was not a thing her father didn't want to do for her. Yet he left her in the hands of strangers who cheated her of her rights and treated her as if she had been a beggar. . . ."

"Why did they do it," the boy asked, quite unable to grasp the idea of such a thing.

"Because they could make a little more money that way, and because they cared for nothing but money. Promise me, Keith, that whatever happens to you, and whatever the temptation be, you will never put money above everything else."

Keith shook his head earnestly, meaning it to be a sign of assent. He was a highly impressible child, and when his mother spoke to him like that, he used literally to choke with a feeling that he could never, never do anything but what she asked, but when another rush of feeling swept over him, the old promises were also likely to be swept out of his mind.

"Those people did the worst thing any one can do to anybody else. They twisted Granny's life so that it could never be set right again. And so she became what you see her now. . . ."

"You mean she just couldn't help herself," Keith put in.

"Yes, that's what I mean," she agreed. Then she

stopped as if struck by another thought, and said very slowly:

"Although, if she had been really strong. . . ."

Once more she stopped and returned abruptly to her story:

"Your great-grandfather made and sold hats, and he earned a lot of money, and they made him a City Councillor. . . ."

"Where," Keith broke in again.

"In Skara," his mother explained, "which is a city that lies a long way from here, and when you begin to learn geography, you will know where it is. . . . Everybody liked your great-grandfather. . . ."

"What was his name," Keith couldn't help asking.

"Lack," she said, "and now you mustn't interrupt me any more if you want me to go on."

"Please," Keith pleaded. "I won't!"

"The reason they liked him," she resumed, "was that he was so good-hearted that he couldn't say no to anybody or anything. He didn't seem to care for money at all, and he used to say: 'What's money between friends?' Everybody wanted to be friends with him in those days, and everybody borrowed from him, until he didn't have enough left for his business, and then they laughed at him. He tried in his turn to borrow, but no one could spare a penny, and when things went entirely wrong with him, one of those who had got most from him made a funny saying about him: 'Now Lack lacks everything because everybody has what Lack lacks.' So, you see, you mustn't think too little of money either, but learn to be careful and keep what you have."

Keith nodded dutifully, but where the right road lay, he could not see.

"The worst thing was," the mother went on, "that your great-grandmother died when Granny was only nine. There were brothers and sisters, too, and she was the youngest. And it was then that her father got the idea to send her to some farmer people he knew, quite some distance from where he lived. He did it partly for the sake of Granny's health, and partly because he was too worried about other things to look after her properly himself. And he paid a lot of money for her board, and sent her fine clothes, and arranged that she was to be taught by the pastor of the parish, and he sent friends to ask about her, but he never came himself. The people who were to take care of Granny kept the money and the clothes, and put her to work as if she had been a servant, and didn't let her get the least bit of schooling. And when her father's friends came and asked about her, they told all sorts of tales about how well she was doing, but she was so shy, they said, that she always ran away when any visitor came to the place."

"Did she," asked Keith.

"Yes, she really did," the mother admitted. "She was ashamed of the way she looked and was dressed, and yet she was quite pretty, and she had the most wonderful hair that reached to her feet when she let it down."

"But, why didn't she tell somebody?" Keith insisted, his blood running hot with wrath at the injustice to which Granny had been submitted.

"Oh, because . . ." said his mother wearily, "be-

cause your grandmother has always been peculiar in that way when she knew she was being wronged. 'What is the use?' she says. And then word came that her father had gone bankrupt and had died soon after. No one seemed to pay the least attention to her. She stayed where she was, and she couldn't work any harder than she had done all the time. But when she was to be confirmed, and had to go to church every week with all the other children of her own age, she was the poorest of them all, both in fact and in appearance, and she didn't have one person in the world to whom she could turn. She has told me that she used to lie awake nights crying and thinking of running away, but she couldn't make up her mind to that either."

She stopped, and Keith waited in vain for the rest of the story.

"And then," he urged.

"Oh, then she came to Stockholm and married your grandfather—my papa, you know. And now Lena is waiting for me to tell her what we are to have for dinner."

Keith went back to his own corner for a while. Then he made a dash for the kitchen, where he found Granny seated in her usual place peeling potatoes. Having placed a smaller foot-stool beside the large one on which she was seated, he got up on it so that he could put both arms about her neck. Pressing his own soft cheek against hers, he asked brokenly:

"Are you very unhappy, Granny?"

"No," she answered placidly, "not when you are willing to give me a kiss."

"All right," he said without enthusiasm as he com-

plied with her request. At the same time he recalled suddenly that he had not played a single game with his tin soldiers that whole morning.

XII

THE boy had a logical mind. He knew that Granny's story had not been finished, and he wanted all of it. At the first opportune moment he asked his mother:

"Was Granny a little girl when she came to Stockholm?"

"No," said his mother unsuspectingly, "she was already a young woman."

"What did she do before?"

"I told you," the mother replied, now on her guard.

"You told me what she did as a little girl, but not afterwards. I want to know."

"Oh, she worked, I suppose."

There was evidently nothing more to be had in that direction.

"And what did she do in Stockholm," Keith pushed on.

"She married your grandfather, as I told you, and then I was born."

"What was he?"

The mother remained silent for a good long while, and Keith repeated his question, not yet having learned

that unanswered questions generally are unwelcome questions.

"He was a *vaktmästare,*" she said finally, and Keith knew that, for some reason, she found the word unpleasant.

The boy reflected a while before he observed:

"That's what papa is."

"Your father's position is quite different," his mother rejoined sharply. "It's a shame that he and his comrades in the bank have no other title—although some of them deserve nothing better."

"What should they be called?"

"I don't know exactly—collectors, I think, because they go around and collect the money that is due to the bank."

"And what are real *vaktmästare* doing?"

"The real ones work in government departments—not as officials, but just as attendants—it's something you can't understand yet."

Keith nodded. He didn't understand, but the words stuck, and the understanding came later.

"And those that are not real," he persisted.

His mother laughed and patted him on the head.

"There is a lot of them," she said. "They look after coats and hats in theatres and restaurants, and wait at dinners, and do all sorts of things.

"Was that what grandfather was doing?"

A queer look came into his mother's eyes and sent a glow of self-satisfaction through his whole being. The look was familiar to him and meant that his mother was annoyed by the question but pleased with his cleverness in thinking of it.

"No," she answered, "not exactly. . . ."

"What did he do," asked Keith, and as he spoke he sent a look of anticipation toward his own corner.

"He was an attendant in the big club where all the rich business-men go to spend their evenings, and he died when I was a little girl . . . have you nothing else to ask about?"

"What was papa's father," Keith ventured after a pause.

"He worked in the royal palace." Again the mother's tone served as a warning, but also as a goad to the boy's curiosity.

"What did he do there," he demanded eagerly.

The lines about his mother's mouth grew tighter and harder, and she spoke as if the words hurt her—but she did not refuse to answer, and she did not send him away:

"He was a lackey."

From the moment he began to speak, Keith had showed an unusual sense for the value and peculiarities of words. They interested him for their own sake, one might say. He treasured them, and he gave more thought to them than to people. The word lackey he had heard before, and he had formed a distinct opinion about it as not desirable.

"Then he was a servant," he blurted out.

"In a way," his mother admitted. "And we are all servants, for that matter. But working in the king's palace is not like—working as Lena does here, for instance."

The last part of her remark went by unheeded by Keith. His thoughts leapt instead to his paternal grandmother—a strict and unapproachable little lady who visited them at rare intervals dressed in a quaint

old shawl and a lace-trimmed cap. A great wonder, not unmixed with pleasure, rose in his mind at the thought that her husband had been a sort of servant after all. For some reason utterly beyond him, there was solace as well as humiliation in the consciousness of a stigma, if such it be, that attached equally to both his grandfathers, and not only to his mother's parent. Then a new idea prompted a new question.

"Was Granny a servant when she came to Stockholm?"

"She was obliged to take service in order to live," his mother replied very gently. "There is nothing about that to be ashamed of . . . I have known fine ladies who started in the kitchen. But, of course, one doesn't like to talk of it to everybody."

Keith recognized the hint in her final words, but thought it needless. He was already on his way back to his own corner, tired for the time of asking questions, when he suddenly turned and said:

"We are just as good as anybody else, are we not?"

It was a phrase he had overheard sometime. Now it seemed to fit the occasion, and it sounded good to him.

"There is the royal family," his mother rejoined enigmatically. "But one of Granny's cousins was a lieutenant-colonel in the army."

"Where is he now," Keith demanded, agog with interest.

"He is dead, and—and we have never had anything to do with his family."

XIII

THE inquisitiveness of Keith with regard to his ancestors and the past life of his parents continued for quite a while. Other family connections seemed unreal and did not interest him. Having no sister or brother of his own, relationships of that kind were meaningless to him. Parents, on the other hand, constituted a tangible personal experience, and the presence of Granny taught him that this experience was common to grown-up people as well as children.

The curiosity he evinced was queerly impersonal, however, and might well be called intellectual. The information he received had no power over his own life. He could have been told anything, and he would have accepted it calmly as something not affecting himself. The only thing that influenced him was the manner of the person answering his questions. To that manner he was almost morbidly sensitive, and from it he concluded whether the various details related should please or disturb him.

Instinctively he pressed his inquiries at points eliciting marked resistance. And it was not what he actually learned, but the evasions encountered, that produced the sensitiveness about his own backgrounds which later often influenced his attitude harmfully at moments when he most needed complete self-assurance. It was the reluctance with which certain parts of the family

history were told, and the total withholding of others, that taught him to be ashamed of things for which he could not be held personally responsible. The effect of this lesson on his character was the more fatal because it remained unconscious so long. Having become doubtful as to the worth of the roots of the tree, it was only natural that he should also feel doubts about the fruit.

Concerning the real character of his forbears he learned next to nothing. All that he heard related to external circumstances that were, or were not, judged respectable and presentable. One fact in particular was subject to the most rigid exclusion from all family conversations, and yet it leaked down to Keith at a time when he was utterly incapable of appreciating its significance. It piqued him mightily without disturbing him.

One day they were visited by his father's married sister, who was lacking in sentimentality and had a disturbing way of calling a spade a spade. The inevitable testing of the boy's cleverness by making him tell his own name led to a discussion of family names in general, Keith's mother expressing a great admiration for that of Wellander.

"Oh, yes, it's good enough," remarked her sister-in-law, "but it is not the right one, you know, and the old one was much finer."

"I know," said the mother, "but I don't know what the name used to be."

"Cederskjöld, and I think it was recognized as noble. I never knew the inside of it, but it looks peculiar. Karl's and my father and his brother and two sisters took common action to get the family name changed to

Wellander. I am sure my grandfather must have been up to some rather striking deviltry, and for all I know he might have been hanged."

"Hush," cried Keith's mother with a quick glance at the boy who was taking in everything with wide-open eyes and ears.

Keith did not wait for anything more, but sneaked off by himself to think. The change of the name seemed nothing at the time, but the suggestion that his great-grandfather had been hanged was startling enough to give food for many meditations. Fortunately, or unfortunately, his aunt's manner had been too nonchalant to give him any clues. And from the manner of his mother he gathered merely that the asking of questions would be useless. So it came about that Keith for the first time in his life regretted the premature death of his paternal grandfather, from whom, otherwise, he might have elicited some more satisfactory information.

Both grandfathers were dead long before Keith was born. He never saw a portrait of either of them, or had an idea of how they looked. He could not even recall having heard their Christian names. The personality of his paternal grandfather always remained a total blank to him. Of the other one he knew a little more. The fashionable club where his mother's father served was notorious for its conviviality and reckless gambling, and the men were like the masters to some extent. This one of his grandfathers used to love wine, women, cards and everything else that helped to modify life's general drabness. He must have been something of a wit, too, in his own circles, having any

number of boon companions. Keith never heard what kind of a man he was at home. He made good money while he lived and spent it as carelessly as he earned it. At forty-two he died, leaving a penniless widow to look after a daughter still in her early teens. Keith's paternal grandfather died in the same way, but his widow, who was a hard-headed little woman of old peasant stock—the best in Sweden—did better with four children than the other grandmother with one.

There were gaps in the stories of his mother and Granny concerning which he never got a direct reply from them, but by degrees he picked up many missing details from other sources. What he learned in this way indicated merely that they had been very poor at times, and poverty had forced them to earn a living by work that was quite honest and decent, but not "socially respectable." At one time, before her daughter was old enough to assume a share of the burden, Granny had actually had to fall back on the coarsest and humblest menial work—scrubbing and washing by the day in strange houses. Yet she and her daughter appeared throughout that ordeal to have remained on terms of pleasant intimacy with friends of the class to which they regarded themselves as properly belonging.

Another problem never solved for Keith was what sort of schooling his mother had had. Her own failure to tell suggested that it must have been of the slightest. Yet Keith never thought of her as ignorant. She had a bright, eager mind that, when not clouded, acted as a goad on his own. It was she who taught him to read and filled him with an awe for books and book-learning that was, perhaps, not entirely wholesome. She herself read eagerly, though fitfully, her

interest in all such matters varying greatly with her mood and condition. Her day-dreaming was to a large extent directed toward matters literary and artistic. Sometimes, when she had read some novel with a markedly sentimental appeal, she talked vaguely of old ambitions to write, but as a rule it was her ignorance of music that she deplored. In the meantime her lace-making and her embroidery proved an artistic sense not wholly confined to dreams. She was always busy with some work of that kind, but her longings went far beyond it, and it happened more than once that she let her work drop in her lap while she looked at Keith with an expression he could not understand.

"If only I had had your chance in life," she exclaimed on one occasion of that kind.

"What do you mean," asked the boy, snuggling close to her.

"I mean that you will study and be able to do things," she answered, bending down to kiss him.

At that very moment the father entered and heard what she said.

"Nonsense," he broke in. "The boy is going to learn a trade, and I think we'll ask Uncle Granstedt to make a carpenter of him."

To Keith it was all meaningless, and his mother said nothing at the time, but a slight stiffening of her face warned him that his father's remark pointed in a direction not held desirable by her. And from that sign the boy took his cue.

XIV

THE outside door stood open and no one was in the kitchen but Granny. The temptation to explore was irresistible.

"When the cat's away, the rats dance on the tray," the old grandmother muttered as if to herself.

"I'll just have a peep," Keith explained, turning to her for a moment. Then he made for the open door again.

The landing with its bare stone floor was familiar to him and quite barren of interest. What drew him magnetically was the tall archway leading to the mysterious upper regions known as the garret, where strange old women lived in hermit cells, and whence disturbing noises issued day and night. Even as he looked up there, he could hear a spookish grating that seemed to symbolize the spirit of the place. He shuddered a little, but not unpleasantly, for he knew what caused it.

In the brick wall ending the upward vista, he could see a square open hole with an iron shutter held open at right angles by an iron rod. As the wind shook the shutter, the rod scraped against the socket that held its hooked end. That was all—but on dark winter afternoons the effect was most disturbing.

"I'm not afraid," Keith announced, sensing his own bravery rather keenly.

"Why should you be," asked Granny.

Then he noticed the tall iron door fastened to on side of the arch in front of it. Now it was doubled u length-wise and folded back so as to leave the passag free.

"What's that for," he asked, pointing to the doo

"In case of fire," said Granny. "If it should begi to burn up there, they would close that door to kee the flames from the rest of the house."

"Would it burn much," Keith wondered.

"Your father has five cords of good birch woo stored in the top attic, so I think the whole city woul see the blaze."

"And the people up there?"

"They would have to come down before we close the doors, but God have mercy on us if it ever gets tha far. Remember, boy, there is nothing worse than fir so you must always be careful and never play wit matches."

"I know," said Keith, nodding sagely.

But he really did not know what fire meant until few nights later. The whole family was soundl asleep, Keith on the chaiselongue, his father an mother in the big bed on the other side of the roo While still half asleep he could hear his mother cry ing his father's name in a strangely agitated voice.

Then he woke fully and looked up. Every object i the room was clearly visible, but the light comin through the windows was not daylight. It was re dish and glaring, and the very reflection of it within th room filled the boy with vague uneasiness.

The father jumped out of bed and ran to the wi dow.

"It is fire," he said. "Something terrible. My Lord, half the town must be burning. The whole sky is a mass of flames. And it's in the direction of the bank."

Suddenly he turned back and began to dress in wordless haste.

"Must we get out," asked the mother.

"No, it is not very close yet, but you had better get up and dress—and get everybody dressed."

By that time he was putting on his overcoat.

"Where are you going, Carl," demanded the mother, evidently more scared by his going out than by the fire.

"To the bank," answered the father, grimly.

"You mustn't, Carl! I won't let you go out! Think if anything should happen to you!"

"Nonsense," he said. "I am in no danger—but I must see what's happening to the bank, and help if things have to be taken out."

"Carl, Carl. . . ." was all the mother could get over her lips.

"Don't worry, Ann," he pleaded, bending over her for a minute, and his voice took on a tenderness Keith seemed never to have heard before. "I shall be careful, but I must go. If the fire should come this way, I'll be back in time to help you all out."

She tried to cling to him, but he freed himself with gentle firmness. In a minute more he was gone, and in the next second Keith's mother was at the window looking out, though she had only her night-linen on and it was late autumn. Unobserved and unrebuked, Keith joined her, and when he looked up at the sky, his heart almost stopped beating.

A ghastly stillness reigned outside—except when it

was merely accentuated by the occasional sound
hurried steps along the street at the top of the lan
Finally some one was heard passing through the la
itself.

"Please," Keith's mother cried at the top of h
voice. "What is it?"

"It's the German Church," a voice responded fro
below. "The whole spire is flaming like a torch."

"Are we in danger down here?"

"Hard to tell. It depends on which way the spi
falls. If it falls outward, I fear the whole city wi
go."

Then he walked off.

By that time the servant girl had come in weepin
as if she had just heard her own death-doom a
nounced, and from the kitchen Granny was calling
them:

"You'll freeze to death, all of you, if you don't p
on some clothes."

So they dressed, though with difficulty, and the
there was nothing to do but to wait. The mother w
at the window all the time, and every few minutes s
said to the boy:

"Oh, I hope nothing happens to your father!"

At first it scared him more than did the light. B
after a while it began to have an opposite effect. H
seemed to grow stiff and hard. The excitement
the fire was still there, but it was overlaid and almo
neutralized by a vast impatience that seemed to tak
possession of his whole being. He felt that if h
mother made the same remark once more, he shou
yell with rage and agony, and to save himself, he joine

Granny in the kitchen, where the girl had started a fire in order to make some coffee.

The sky in that quarter was just as bright as in front, and no light was needed in the room.

Suddenly he heard his mother cry out:

"Oh."

At the same time the brightness seemed to increase to something more than daylight.

A quick change took place in the boy's heart. He ran into the living-room and put his arm about his mother, who was still lying in the window.

"Don't worry, mamma," he whispered to her. "I'll take care of you."

There was something in his voice that brought the mother to herself. She closed the window and took him in her arms and kissed him as she had never kissed him before, he thought.

"It was the spire that fell just now," she said, "and if there is any danger, your father will be here in a minute."

Almost as she spoke, the glare outside began to die down, though the sky remained red and threatening until daybreak.

Then they had coffee, Keith being allowed an extra dose in his milk. And soon afterwards the father returned to tell the story of the fire and inform them that all danger was over as far as they were concerned.

For days afterwards the experiences of that night occupied Keith's mind. The joy of excitement was probably uppermost in spite of all other considerations. Beneath it was a vivid conception of the horrors of fire that remained a live thing in his mind until he was

well on in years, sometimes waking him out of his sleep at night and setting his heart palpitating wildly at the mere idea of danger. Lastly, however, there was left from that momentous night a new attitude toward the mother that implied a direct criticism—the first one that had ever broken into clear consciousness. It did not make him love her less, but it changed the character of his love in some subtle way. The father, on the other hand, had gained by that night. There was something heroic about the quiet way in which he walked off to take care of the bank, pushing all other considerations aside until that duty had been filled.

XV

GRADUALLY Keith learned to know the old house from top to bottom. The garret and the cellar remained sources of excitement for a long time. The rest of it offered little to hold the attention or feed the imagination.

It covered three sides of a rectangle, with the courtyard in the centre. The wall of the adjoining house formed the fourth side—a sheer cliff of plastered brick that towered two whole stories higher, its dreary expanse unbroken by a single window. Along the foot of it ran a long low structure with innumerable doors opening on the courtyard. Thither men, women and children had to descend regardless of weather or hour or season, and every visitor could be watched from the windows opening on the yard.

The rear part of the house constituted practically a

building by itself, with a stairway of its own, and the people living there seemed to form a world apart, with which Keith never became very well acquainted. But on the ground-floor of that part was the laundry, used in turn by every household in the entire house and regarded by the boy as a far-off, adventurous place until he had been allowed to visit it a couple of times.

The building facing the lane and that running along the courtyard had a stairway in common at the corner where they joined. Its stairs and landings were of stone, uncarpeted, and lighted in the day by a window on each floor and at night by a single gas jet on each landing. At the foot of the lowermost flight of stairs was a long and dark passage that turned at a right angle and finally reached the lane after what seemed a long walk. Branching to the right, at the foot of the stairs, was another passage from which the cellar was reached after you had used all your strength to push open a huge iron door that squeaked uncannily on its stiff hinges.

The flats on the second and third floors ran straight through from the lane to the rear building, but on the fourth floor, where Keith lived, another family occupied the rooms looking upon the courtyard. And there lived Jonas, the only other child in the house during Keith's earliest years.

Jonas' father was a compositor—a tall, lank, hollow-eyed man with a bad cough. His mother was a woman of the people, angular and taciturn. Jonas himself was pale and gawky and shy.

Those two families, living within a few feet of each other and meeting daily on the common landing, had little more intercourse than if they had been parted

by miles of desert. The reserved and slightly eccentric character of the neighbours had something to do with this separation, but social distinctions counted for more. A compositor was, after all, a mere workman, and Keith felt instinctively that his mother looked with kindly contempt at the more primitive ways of the adjoining household. Now and then he was permitted to go and play for a little while with Jonas, who was a year older, but the other boy hardly ever entered Keith's home. Nor was their playing much of a success. Jonas was slow-witted and reserved, while alertness and frankness were among Keith's most characteristic traits. But differences of temperament accounted only in part for their failure to come together. Keith felt as if a wall of some kind stood between them, and as if the eyes watching him from the other side of that wall were distinctly hostile at times. It exasperated him as if it had implied some terrible injustice, but it was only in moments of extreme boredom he really cared. At such moments he would also develop a passionate desire for a brother or sister. He might have wished for a dog or a cat even, but the idea of such a disturbing element in his parental home seemed too preposterous for serious contemplation. In fact, so foreign was that idea to the home atmosphere, that Keith went through the rest of his life envying other people's pets without ever giving earnest thought to the acquisition of one for himself.

Just as the parental attitude toward the nearest neighbours suggested a kindly but unsentimental tolerance of inferiors, so it became unmistakably tinged with a slightly jealous but unprotesting submission to superiors whenever the lower floors were reached. A

bachelor official of some kind lived on the floor immediately below, with no one but his housekeeper to share his spacious apartment. As deputy landlord, Keith's father had to see this tenant like all the rest, but of social intercourse there was none, while on the other hand, Keith's mother kept up a gossiping acquaintance with the housekeeper. As far as Keith himself was concerned, there was nothing more awe-inspiring than a chance meeting on the stairs with the monocle, side-whiskers, precise manners and doled-out civility of Mr. Bureau-Chief Broström. The distance was so immense that even aspirations were precluded on the part of the boy. He could imagine being king, but not a duly appointed government official with a salary enabling him to occupy half a dozen rooms practically by himself.

Of course, there were rumours afloat about a more intimate relationship between the bureau chief and his fairly good-looking housekeeper, who nominally had for her own that part of the flat which faced the courtyard, and these rumours did not escape the boy's keen ears. While their true inwardness was incomprehensible to him, they made him look wonderingly at the housekeeper whenever he met her, and when he accepted her gingersnaps and other tempting delicacies, he did so with a sense of wickedness that limited his gratefulness.

A retired dry goods dealer and his good-hearted old wife lived on the second floor. The Fernbloms were the aristocracy of the house in the lane, having the best rooms, paying the highest rent and giving the biggest parties, but even Keith guessed quite early that they were simple souls, risen by thrift from very hum-

ble origins. They had a single daughter, a girl of delicate health and looks with whom Keith probably would have fallen in love hopelessly if she had stayed in the house. But she married early, moved to some other city and was rarely seen in her old home. Reports of her progress were received, of course, and passed on in the hearing of Keith, but like so many other things not touching his own life closely, it carried no real meaning to his mind. The parties continued, and Keith's parents were often invited, partly because the old couple was too simple-minded to think of social distinctions, and partly because they both came from the same district as Keith's Granny. Keith would be allowed to come along at times, and he liked the idea of going and the good food, but otherwise he found it dull business watching a lot of grown-up people seated solemnly about square tables playing cards. Then, one day, the old lady died, and Keith attended a part of the funeral, and from the window he saw the coffin taken away in a hearse buried in flowers. It made him ask many questions of his mother, but none of her answers brought death any closer to his mind. After all, the old lady had been nothing to him, and if the parties should cease as he heard was likely, the loss did not seem great to him. The only thing that made a real difference to him was his discovery that there would be no more of those ball-shaped gingersnaps that the old lady used to bake herself and keep in an earthen jar almost as tall as Keith.

The front part of the ground floor was used as an office of some kind in those early days, but the middle part facing the long row of outhouses was a human habitation. The rooms were so dark that a lamp had

to be used most of the day, and the principal entrance was direct from the courtyard. An old workman and his wife lived there until the office in front was changed into a coffee-house and those rooms toward the courtyard became the kitchen. When it happened, some one told Keith's mother a story which she in her turn conveyed to the boy.

History repeated itself, she said, and Keith already knew that history was something that had happened before he was born. One hundred years ago, when Gustavus III was king of Sweden and things were more exciting than in these later days of outward and inward peace, there used also to be a coffeehouse on the ground floor, and a widely known one at that. It occupied the floor above too, but this floor was in reality used as a club, and the club was political and the men who frequented it were conspiring against the government. This the police knew, and every so often a lot of armed and uniformed men would surround the house and make prisoners of those caught in the clubrooms on the second floor. But as a rule no one was found there but a couple of sleepy and grouchy attendants who cursed their luck at having to spend their lives in such a dull place.

"But," Keith interrupted when the story got that far, "you just told me that the rooms had a lot of conspirators in them."

"So they had."

"And yet they were empty when the police came there? Do you really mean that the people could make themselves invisible?"

"That's where the real story comes in," his mother explained. "You know there is a long passageway

between the front rooms of the Fernbloms and their kitchen in the year. It runs back of the stairs. The next time you go through it, stamp your foot very hard, and you will hear that it sounds hollow in one place. At that spot there used to be a trap door in the floor. Now it is nailed down hard, but in the old days it could be opened any time, and then you found a stairway below. It led into our part of the cellar, where you still can find a couple of stone steps at one end. Then the conspirators went down into the main cellar, and at the back of it there was a tunnel leading under the rear part of the house and the lane beyond to a house on the other side. That's the way they escaped, and that's why the police never found anybody in the club."

"What did the conspirators want," asked Keith after he had pondered the matter for a while.

"I don't know exactly," his mother admitted, "but the king was killed by one of them at last."

"I wish I had been there to defend the king," said Keith. Then a new thought seized him suddenly: "I want to go down and see those steps."

"All right," his mother answered to his astonishment and joy. "Lena will soon go down to get potatoes for dinner, and then you can go along, if you will only promise to come right up again."

Shortly afterwards the momentous expedition actually took place. Keith had been as far as the outer cellar door before, but he had never cared to go further. When you opened that door, you were met by an air so cold and damp that it struck your face like a wet sheet, and the stairs fell away into a black abyss that seemed bottomless.

The door was of iron, rounded at the top to fit the arch, and covered with rust. It looked as if it had been in its place since the house was built, and Keith had heard that the house could not be less than two hundred years old. The key, which Keith had been permitted to carry going down, was of iron too, and nearly twice as long as Keith's hand. The lock was in keeping with the key, enormous in size and so stiff that Lena had to use both hands to turn the key.

Having laid a firm hold of Lena's skirt, Keith followed her several steps down until they reached a place in the opposite wall where a single very tall step led up to another iron door, square-cut and narrow, back of which lay the cellar used by the Wellanders. Lena lighted a candle that burned with difficulty in the clammy air.

Inside nothing could be seen at first but a number of boxes and barrels full of supplies, and back of them walls built out of enormous stone blocks and dripping with moisture. As his eyes became accustomed to the dim light, however, Keith perceived that the end toward the lane was closed by a wall which even his inexperienced glance recognized as brick and comparatively new. Squeezing between two large barrels of potatoes, he saw two stone steps at the foot of that wall and managed actually to put his foot on one of them.

"I wish I knew what's back of that wall," he remarked at last.

"Oh, nothing," said Lena indifferently.

"There might be skeletons," he ventured after a pause.

"Jesus Christ, child," Lena almost screamed, look-

ing as if she had caught sight of a ghost. "Where in the world does he get such notions from? Come out of here now. I think the master will have to go down for potatoes himself hereafter."

"There was a skeleton in the story you told me the other night," Keith protested with dignity, but not unaffected by the girl's unmistakable fright.

"This is no place for stories of that kind," she declared pulling him away from the barrels and almost forgetting to close the cellar door behind her.

That evening Keith kept thinking of the story and the steps in the cellar. He was sorry not to be able to walk up those stairs. And there must be some old things left lying about on them. Then he imagined himself a conspirator, hearing the police beating at the doors and making his way through the stairway and the tunnel to some quiet, unobserved doorway in another lane, much narrower and darker than their own. It was exciting, especially the passage through the tunnel, which he could actually see with his mind's eye—but the part of conspirator did not appeal to him. He had seen policemen on the street several times. They were very tall and carried sabres. Some time when he was conspiring they might be too quick for him and get him before he could reach the secret stairway. It would be much better, he decided finally, to be able to look them in the face and say truthfully:

"I have done nothing at all!"

XVI

THE regular meals of the day were four, not counting "afternoon coffee" which was regarded as a special treat and always subject to negotiations, though forthcoming as unfailingly as dinner or supper. It was the natural and nominal counterpart of the "morning coffee," which served to initiate the day's feeding. This first meal was consumed separately, as each person was ready for work, and on the whole its name was appropriate, although plenty of bread went with the coffee. Keith's turn came generally a little after seven, when he sat down to a large cup or bowl of half coffee and half milk into which had been broken a good sized piece of hard Swedish rye-bread. A little sugar was allowed, but no butter. This regimen began when Keith was less than three years old, and he enjoyed it immensely, provided the bread had steeped long enough to become soft. When, at last, he turned to rolls and butter dipped into the coffee, it did not mean that his taste had changed, but merely that his increasing sense of manhood found the earlier dish too childish.

Breakfast was due about 11:30 and consisted generally of sundry left-overs from the preceding day, bread and butter forming one of the principal ingredients. Then came the main meal of the day, dinner, between 3:30 and 4 in the afternoon. As a rule it had only

two courses: some meat dish or fish with potatoes, and a soup served last. Now and then there was a vegetable. Desserts were reserved for special occasions. To Keith each such meal was inseparably connected with the parental admonition: "Eat plenty of bread with your meat, child." The bread was of the hard kind already referred to—thin round cakes that one broke to pieces and that gave the teeth plenty of work. Various superstitions were invoked to promote the consumption of it. Thus the failure to finish a piece already broken off was alleged to result in the transfer of all one's strength to the actual consumer of the piece left behind. Keith was a docile child in spite of his impulsiveness and he did what he was told and believed what he heard, but he often wondered why the rules so strictly enforced upon himself did not apply to his parents.

"Afternoon coffee," generally accompanied by some form of sweet bread or cake, "happened" about 5:30, and at 8 supper was served. The final meal was commonly made up of sandwiches with porridge and milk, or perhaps, when fate was remarkably propitious, thin pancakes with cranberry jam. There might be an extra snack of food at a still later hour in case of unexpected callers, but such visits were not frequent and Keith would be asleep by that time anyhow.

It was different when parties were given to formally invited company. Then Keith had to stay up—or pretend to do so—as long as the guests remained, and he must have a share of whatever the house had to offer. To such occasions he looked forward with feverish joy, not so much on account of the good things

dispensed as for the sake of feeling the ordinary strict rules relaxed. Apart from Christmas, the principal celebrations took place on his parents' birthdays and "namedays." Every day in the Swedish calendar carries a name, and all those bearing it have a right to expect felicitations and presents from their relations and more intimate friends. In return they are expected to celebrate the occasion with a party that gives an excuse for showing what the house can do in the way of hospitality. The same thing applies to the birthday anniversaries, only in a higher degree. Not to celebrate one's birthday can only be a sign of poverty, miserliness or misanthropy, and to overlook the birthday anniversary of a close relative is to risk an immediate breach of connections.

Nothing was more familiar to Keith than his mother's open worries about money and his father's occasional stern reference to the need of saving. To the boy those complaints and warnings meant merely that the parents were in a depressed and unfavourable mood, tending to draw the usual constraint a little tighter about him. He was intensely sensitive to atmosphere, and too often that of his home had the same effect on his young soul as the low-hanging, leaden skies of a Swedish December day before the first snow has fallen. It made him long for sunlight, and the parties brought it to some extent. Then care and caution were forgotten, although his father might grumble before and after. Then the daily routine was broken, and Granny became cynically but actively interested, bent above all on seeing that "the house should not be shamed."

When the great day came, the home, always scrupulously neat, shone with cleanliness. Every one worked up to the last minute. Cupboards and pantries were full of unfamiliar and enticing supplies. The dining table, opened to its utmost length, groaned under the burden of innumerable cold dishes of tempting appearance, while from the kitchen came the odours of more substantial courses still in the making. A one end of Granny's bureau stood a battery of multicoloured bottles. The other end was jammed with desserts and goodies meant to be served while the guests were waiting for supper or during the card game that generally followed it. Better than anything else, however, was the father's loud laugh and eager talk, so rarely heard in the course of their regular daily existence. Even then he might be displeased by some slight slip of the boy's, and a sharp rebuke might follow, but it seemed forgotten as soon as uttered, and of other consequences there were none to be feared. Therefore, Keith wished that there might be a party every day, and while there was one going on he sometimes caught himself wondering whether, after all, he did not like his father as much as his mother, or more.

From his own experiences with food as well as from his parents' attitude toward it, both on special and on ordinary occasions, Keith distilled a sort of philosophy that it took him several decades to outlive. To him eating became a good thing in itself, rather than a means to an end. His parents were neither gluttons nor gourmets, but they liked good food, and, what was of still greater importance, good eating represented the principal source of enjoyment open to them.

The same seemed true of their friends, and when company arrived no topic was more in favour than a comparison of past culinary enjoyments. Keith's father, for instance, never grew tired of telling about the time when he was still the chief clerk in a fashionable grocery and the owner gave him permission to dispose freely of a keg of Holland oysters that threatened to "go bad" before they could be sold. Four or five friends were drummed together. The feast took place at night in the store itself. Bread, butter, salt, pepper, liquor, beer and cards were the only things added to the oysters.

"And when morning came, and I had to open the store, there was nothing left but a keg full of empty shells," the father used to shout, laughing at the same time so that it was hard to catch what he said. Then he would smack his lips and add with earnest conviction: "I have never tasted anything better unless it be the Russian caviar we used to import for the Court."

Always it was a matter of quantity as well as quality. A feast was not a feast without more than plenty. Eating was always in order. An offer of a dish was as good as a command to partake. A refusal bordered on the offensive. Pressing a reluctant guest was the highest form of hospitality. Dietary precautions were apparently unheard of except in the case of certain chronic ailments, and then they were accepted as one of life's worst evils. To eat well was to be well, and the natural conclusion was that the best cure in case of trouble was to eat. Lack of appetite was a misfortune as well as a dangerous symptom, and to eat when not hungry was not only a necessity but a virtue.

Yet Keith longed for other things and he learned early that even eating has its drawbacks.

XVII

EXCEPT on Sundays, the father rarely ate with the rest of the family. He left in the morning before Keith was up and never came home for breakfast. His dinner often had to wait until five or six or even later, and so he seldom cared to eat again when the others had their supper.

One afternoon, however, he appeared just as Keith and his mother were about to sit down for dinner. It put her in a flutter and she couldn't get an additional cover laid quick enough.

"I heard that mother was coming," he remarked as he seated himself at the table.

Instantly Keith's mother shot an apprehensive glance at the boy and exclaimed:

"Please try to be a real nice boy now, so that your grandmother does not get a bad impression of you." Then she added, turning to her husband: "She never says anything, but she always looks as if I spoiled Keith hopelessly."

"Well," the father rejoined thoughtfully, "she brought up four children of her own without anybody else to help her, and there was not one among us who dared to disregard her slightest word."

"How about Henrik," the mother suggested a little tartly.

"Yes, the one spared is the one spoiled," admitted the father with a sigh. "He was the youngest, and while he was licked like all of us, her hand never seemed quite as firm with him as with the rest. The worst thing parents can do to children is to let them have their own will."

Keith was listening with one ear only. His thoughts were on Uncle Henrik, who would put in an unheralded appearance now and then, always when the father was away and always to the consternation of the whole household. Although hustled out of the kitchen as soon as the unbidden visitor arrived, Keith had had a good look at him several times and had also overheard the parents discussing him. He was still comparatively young. Yet he looked like animated waste matter. His face seemed to hang on him. His mouth was loose and void of expression. His eyes were bleared and ever on the move. He spoke mostly in a toneless drawl, that sometimes turned into a shrill whine, but also at rare intervals could change into a soft, heart-winning purr. His clothing was poorer and coarser than that of any other person seen by Keith. Once or twice it seemed to the boy like a repulsive uniform, and he heard his parents speak with mingled disgust and relief of some house or institution that was never fully named.

"No one has a better heart than Henrik," Keith heard his father say once, "but he has no more spine than a cucumber, and he can't keep away from drink."

Then the food was brought in, and Uncle Henrik was forgotten. As usual, there was a meat course to begin with, and Keith ate what for him was a big portion. Nor did he get into any trouble beyond having

an extra large piece of hard bread put beside his plate by the father and finding the disposal of it rather difficult.

The meat was followed by a large bowl of soup, and the very sight of it made Keith look unhappy—a fact that did not escape his father.

Keith cared little for soups, while both parents liked them, and he had a particular dislike of soups made on a meat stock, like the one just brought in. For some reason that Keith might have thought funny under other circumstances, it was called Carpenter Soup, and it contained a lot of rather coarse vegetables. Among these were green celery and parsnips, both of which filled the boy with an almost morbid disgust.

While the mother was serving and Keith was waiting in dumb agony, it flashed through his mind that Uncle Grandstedt might be eating that kind of soup. If so, the boy thought, he would rather let himself be killed than made a carpenter.

As the turn came to his own plate, Keith tried to catch his mother's eye with a signalled appeal to put in as little as possible, but she was talking to her husband and not noticing the boy at all. And so, at last, he found himself confronted with a plate filled to the brim.

The first few spoonfuls went down without much resistance, chiefly because he confined himself to the fluid part of the soup. Then it seemed of a sudden as if one more mouthful would choke him, and his eating became a mere dallying with his spoon.

"Go on and finish your soup," the father urged sternly.

"I can't."

"Why?"

"I have eaten all I can."

"That does not matter," rejoined his father. "One must always finish what is on one's plate."

"But I don't like it," Keith blurted out in a moment of desperation—which was unfortunate.

"Children have no likings of their own," said the father, putting down his spoon. "They must like what their parents give them. And you will finish that soup—if I have to feed you myself to make you do it."

Two more spoonfuls went down by an heroic effort. Then Keith burst into tears, and his father's face grew still darker as he asked scornfully:

"Are you a boy or a girl?"

Keith did not care at that moment. In fact, he thought that if girls had a right to cry, he would rather be one.

His mother was trying to coax him with kind words, and he actually raised the filled spoon to his lips once more, but the sensation within him was such that he let it drop again with a splash. That was the crowning offence, and the feeding process began at once. His father took him by the neck with one hand and administered the spoon with the other. It was done firmly and perhaps harshly, but in such a manner that the boy was not hurt.

Keith cried and coughed and swallowed—and in the midst of that ordeal he noticed the wonderful softness of his father's hands. But his heart was full of bitter resentment, and he wished that he could grow up on the spot.

What the end might have been is hard to tell, had

not a slight commotion been heard from the kitchen at that juncture.

"There is mother now," said the father, letting go his hold on Keith's neck. "Wipe your eyes and try to act like a boy. Some day we'll put you into skirts."

Keith did not care. He knew now that he would not have to eat the rest of the soup. That was the one thing in the world that seemed to matter to him. His tears ceased. But now and then his body was shaken by a convulsive sob. On the whole his mood was one of hopeless resignation.

XVIII

I AM glad to see you, mother," said Keith's father, rising quickly as a little old woman appeared in the kitchen doorway. His tone surprised the boy. There was warmth in it, but still more of reverence bordering on awe, and also something of pride. Thus might a queen be greeted, but only by those nearest and dearest to her. What struck the boy most of all, however, was the world of difference lying between that tone and the one in which the father addressed his wife even in moments of closest understanding. It gave Keith his first clear glimpse of the distinction between love and respect, between sympathy and trust.

"So you are home, Carl," the grandmother remarked in her usual quiet, matter-of-fact manner. Then she

turned to her daughter-in-law, who had also risen to her feet: "Is your head as bad as usual, Anna?"

"Thank you," answered Keith's mother, and the boy could sense that she was not at her ease although she smiled pleasantly. "Those new powders I got from Dr. Sköld helped a great deal."

"Hm," grunted the older woman as she walked across the room and sat down on a chair not far from Keith. "I had no time or money to bother with powders at your age, but times have changed."

She was taking in every detail of the room as she spoke, without looking pointedly at anything in particular. Suddenly Keith, who followed her every movement as if hypnotized, was startled by meeting the full gaze of her calm, pale-blue eyes. Those eyes dominated her small, wrinkled face so completely that the boy saw nothing else. Gone were her trimmed cap, her black shawl, her wide skirt of a checkered grey. Gone were even her thin, tight lips that used to close with the firm grip of a vice. Nothing was left but the eyes that looked him through and through until it was impossible for him to stand still any longer.

"What is the matter with Keith," she asked. "Sick, too?"

"No, thank heaven," the mother blurted out. "We have nothing to complain of his health—"

"No," the father broke in with a suggestion of grim humour, "not about his health, but—"

"Of course," the old lady said with a nod of comprehension. "I don't wish to criticize anybody or anything, but I don't think Keith is very obedient. He wants to pick and choose, I suppose, as if the food were not good enough for him."

"Well, he can't," the father rejoined.

"Children should eat anything and be glad to get it at that. Mine never thought of refusing what I gave them. If they ever had. . . ."

She didn't finish the sentence, but it made Keith feel that he would never have dared one word of protest about the soup if the grandmother had been there a little earlier. Yet she spoke without marked feeling, without hardness, almost kindly. It was plain as she went on, that she believed intensely in what she said, and that it touched the very foundations of existence as she saw it:

"Children owe everything to their parents, and the least they can do in return is to accept thankfully what they get. That is what I did in my childhood, and I never dreamt of anything else. I had no will but that of my parents, and I knew that I could not and should not have any will of my own."

Everybody but the grandmother was still standing. The mother's face bore clear evidence of conflicting tendencies to accept and reject. Looking at her, Keith felt, as he often did, that there was something within her that gave his view of matters a fighting chance. The father, on the other hand, seemed of a sudden to have become a child himself, listening obediently and with absorbed approval. It looked almost as if he were still afraid of that white-haired, fragile, tight-lipped little woman, and the sight of him filled Keith with a vague uneasiness.

"Please sit down," said the grandmother at last. "I did not mean to disturb you, and Keith looks as if he might fall in a heap any moment."

"Why don't you stand up straight, Keith," asked

his mother. "You will never grow up unless you do, and your grandmother will think worse of you than she already does."

"I am not blaming the child," the old lady began in the same passive, quietly assured tone. But before she got further, the father broke in:

"I think Keith had better go and play in his own corner—and please keep quiet, for grandmother and I have important things to talk of."

Keith retired as directed, and at that moment growing up seemed to him a more unreal and impossible thing than ever.

Not long afterwards the grandmother left, both parents escorting her to the outside door. When they returned to the living-room, Keith heard his mother say:

"I don't see why she should always find fault with Keith. He's not a bit worse than Brita's Carl, whom she is helping to spoil just as fast as she can."

"Well, that's her way," replied the father, paying no attention to the latter part of the remark. "She was brought up that way herself, and that's the way she brought up the four of us."

He was evidently in high good-humour and did what Keith had never seen him do before when no company was present. He got out a cigar from one of the little drawers in the upper part of mamma's bureau and sat down at the still covered dining table to smoke it. This made Keith feel almost as if they were having a party, and soon he sneaked out of his corner and joined the parents at the table. First he stood hesitatingly beside his mother, but little by little he edged over to the father until he actually was leaning against

the latter's knee without being rebuffed. The father even put his hand on Keith's head, and the soup episode became very distant and dim.

"She used to lick us mercilessly," the father said as if speaking chiefly to himself, and as he spoke there was a reminiscent smile on his face and not a trace of resentment in his voice. "But she was absolutely just about it—so just that she used to lick all four of us whenever one had earned it. That was to keep the rest from thinking themselves any better, she said, and also because she felt sure that all of us had deserved it, although she had not happened to find it out."

"I think it hard and unjust," Keith's mother protested. "And I don't believe in beating children all the time."

"Those were hard days," the father mused on, "and everybody did it, and children seemed to know their place better then. I don't think we suffered very much from the beatings we got, and they certainly did not make us think less of mother. She had her hands full, too, and not much time to think of nice distinctions. We were all small when father died, and Henrik was just a baby. There was no one but her to look after us, and how she did it, God only knows. But I have never heard her speak one word of complaint, and she always managed. Sometimes there was little enough, and we were mighty glad to get what there was, as she told you herself, but she always had something for us. Then we had to go to work just as soon as we could. I was thirteen when I began to add my share to the common heap."

"Did you go to school," Keith ventured, having re-

cently overheard some talk of his parents that seemed to bear on his own immediate future.

"I did," the father replied, "but not long. I wanted to study, and my teacher was so anxious that I should go on that he promised to get me free admission to the higher school. But mother wouldn't listen. And I suppose it was not to be."

"Did you like school," asked Keith, not having the slightest idea of what a school might be like.

"Yes, I liked all about it but one thing. There was a big boy who bullied all the rest, and no one cared to fight him. He went for me the very first day of the term, and when I fought back, he gave me such a licking that I could hardly walk into the schoolroom afterwards. The next day he asked if I had had enough, and I told him I meant to go on till he had enough. So we started right in again, and he licked me worse than the day before. But I just couldn't give in. For three whole months we fought every day, and each day I made it harder for him. And one day I got the upper hand of him at last, and gave it to him until he began to cry and begged for mercy. Then I let him go, but no sooner had I turned my back on him, than he picked up a small sapling that was lying around and struck me over the head with it. There was a piece of root standing straight out, and it hit me right on top of my head so that the blood squirted out and I fainted on the spot. Then he had to leave school, and the last thing I heard of him was that the police had got him for something still worse."

"Oh, Carl," the mother cried with a shudder, "you should have complained to the teacher!"

"The teacher was watching us all the time, although I didn't know it. He told me afterwards that he would have helped me any time I asked, but that he would have thought less of me for asking."

Keith stared hard at his father and tried to imagine himself doing the same thing, but his fancy did not seem to work well in that direction. Later, when he was in bed, the father's story came back to him. Somehow it made him feel very proud, but also uneasy. He felt that there was nothing more wonderful than to fight some one much stronger than oneself and win, and soon he was busy slaying giants and dragons and bears and other monsters that he had heard Granny tell about. But when he tried to think of himself as fighting a real boy in the same way as his father, his dreams seemed to peter out ignominiously.

Then his mother came to tuck him in and make him say his prayers and kiss him good-night. Suddenly he flung his arms about her neck in a passion of craving for tenderness and protection. Putting his mouth close to her ear, he whispered a question that had nothing to do with the father's story or his fancies of a few moments ago.

"Why must I eat things I don't want?"

XIX

THE next Sunday morning found Keith more than usually restless. Half a dozen times in quick succession he appealed to the mother for suggestions as to what to do. Finally she turned

to the father, who was preparing to go out:

"Can't you take him along, Carl? He has never seen the bank, and he really should get out a little."

For a little while the father said nothing. Then he spoke directly to Keith:

"Put on your coat and cap."

The boy who had been looking and listening with open mouth and a heart that hardly dared to beat, became wildly excited.

"Now, Keith," the father admonished, "you can't go unless you behave."

"Where's my coat, mother," asked Keith eagerly and unheedingly.

"Don't you know that yourself," growled the father. "You are a big boy already, and you should keep your own things in order."

"I have hung it up where he cannot reach it," the mother interceded. "I'll get it for him."

The coat and the cap were on at last, but then began the struggle about the muffler and the mittens. The mother had crocheted them herself for Keith and insisted that they should be worn whenever he went outdoors during autumn and winter. The muffler was long and white, with blue rings two inches apart, and in shape more like a boa.

Keith wanted the mittens, because his hands got cold easily, but not the muffler, which, he thought, made him look like a girl.

The father objected to everything of that kind, which he said, tended to make the boy soft and susceptible to colds. He himself did not put on an overcoat until the weather grew very severe, and he never but-

toned it, no matter how cold it grew. His throat was always bare, and he never wore gloves of any kind. Nor did he ever put his hands in his pockets while walking. He had a favourite trick of picking up a handful of snow, which he rolled into a ball and carried in his hand until it became hard as ice. His hands were milk-white, beautifully shaped and well cared for. It was impossible to believe that for many years they had done the hardest kind of work, often outdoors and generally in a poorly heated and drafty shop. He was proud of them, although he pretended not to care when anybody spoke of them, and they filled Keith with admiration and envy. He had tried to follow the father's example, but with the result that his hands grew red as boiled crawfish and began to ache under the nails until he had to cry.

"You bring him up like a woman," the father muttered, when Keith was ready at last.

Then they left, having been kissed several times each by the mother, who warned Keith not to let go of his father's hand under any circumstances while they were on the streets.

Down in the passageway on the ground floor, Keith started to take off the muffler.

"No," said the father. "Now you keep it on. Your mother has told you to wear it, and you must not take it off behind her back."

"But you didn't want me to have it on," Keith protested in genuine surprise.

"No, I didn't, because I want you to be hardened and grow up like a man. But there is something I want still more, and that is for you to obey your mother,

first because children should always obey their parents, and secondly because it makes your mother very unhappy if you don't do as she tells you."

His tone changed slightly during the last part of his remark. Something of an appeal came into it and went straight to Keith's heart, filling it with a glow of righteous determination. It was always that way with him. A word spoken kindly made him eager to comply, and that was particularly the case if it came from some person not given to sentimentality.

In the lane they turned and saw the mother lying in the window to watch them. As usual, kisses were thrown back and forth as they passed up the lane, but Keith felt rather impatient about it, and it was with a marked sense of relief he turned the corner into East Long Street. He was eager to push ahead into unknown regions and did not care to look back.

Although he spoke little enough, the father proved a more genial companion than Keith had dared to expect. In fact, he had been a little oppressed at the thought of being entirely alone with the father, which was quite a new experience to him. But now he found it a pleasure, and their communion seemed more easy than when the mother was with them. He walked sedately enough, clinging to one of his father's soft, white hands, but every so often he ventured a skip and a jump without being rebuked, and on the whole he felt the kind of happiness that used to come on Christmas Eve, after the father had started to distribute the presents.

Keith had frequently accompanied his mother as far as the little square at the end of the street, and he

pointed proudly to the grocery store where he had helped to buy things.

"Yes," responded the father, and again his tone seemed strangely unfamiliar to the boy. "I might have had such a store myself, if luck had been with me."

The idea was more than Keith could digest at once. It was too overwhelming, and once more he looked at his father with the feeling of wonder and awe that sometimes took hold of him almost against his will—a feeling that clashed hopelessly with the nervous shyness commonly inspired by the father's stern manners.

"Why didn't you get it," the boy ventured at last.

"Because I was born under the Monkey Star," replied the father grimly.

The boy wondered what kind of star that was, but still more he wondered at the father's mood which appeared to indicate a displeasure not directed at the questioner. Before Keith could ask anything more, they had started across one of the open market places that line the fresh-water side of the old City.

The place was empty except for a few closed and abandoned booths. But at the foot of it lay rows of one-masted sailing vessels loaded halfway up their masts with piles of fire-wood. In the background, beyond a small sheet of water crossed by a low iron bridge, rose abruptly the rocky walls of the South End, with funny old houses perched precariously along their edges. Keith stared so hard at all the new things that not a single question had a chance to escape him before they entered another street and stopped in front of a stone house that to him looked like a castle.

It had a real portal instead of an ordinary doorway,

and the inside was still more impressive. Keith had been to church once or twice, and for a moment he thought himself in one. But he saw no seats, and his father did not look solemn at all. The walls were of stone curiously streaked and coloured. The ceiling was so far up that Keith had to bend far backwards to see it. It was full of ornaments and supported by two rows of tall round stone pillars so thick that Keith could not get his arms halfway around one of them. In the background rose a very broad and seemingly endless stairway of white stone. While they climbed it step by step, Keith wondered if the king in his palace had anything like it.

Arrived at the top at last, they turned into a sort of lobby—a rather bare room with several plain desks by the windows and many hooks along the inner wall. There the father took off both his coats and armed himself with a huge feather duster and a rag.

"Remember, Keith," he said in his ordinary tone, "that you may look as much as you please, but that you must not touch anything. If you do, you can never come here again."

Having passed through several smaller rooms, they emerged finally into a hall so bright and spacious that Keith stopped with a gasp and for a moment thought himself in the open air again. It was as wide as the building itself and three sides were full of large windows. A counter of mahogany that looked miles long ran from one end to the other. The place behind it contained many desks so tall that Keith could not have reached the tops of them with his raised hand. But from a distance he could see that they were full of

tempting things—paper and pens and pencils, red bars of sealing wax, glue-pots and rulers and glistening shears.

Two men, also in their shirt-sleeves, were busy at the desks, dusting them and arranging the things on top of them. And the father quickly went to work in the same way.

It seemed interesting to Keith, who would have liked to try his hand at it. But it was also disconcerting for some reason he could not explain, and for a while he watched the father as if unwilling to believe his own eyes. Somehow it did not tally with certain notions formed in Keith's head on the night when the church was burning. At last he went up to his father and asked:

"Is this where you always work?"

"No," was the answer given with a peculiar grimness. "This is for the officials."

"What are they?"

"Oh, tellers and cashiers and bookkeepers."

Keith noted the words for future inquiries. For the moment they meant nothing to him.

"Why are you not here too," he persisted.

"Because I am only an attendant—a mere *vaktmästare*. That is a fact you had better fix in your mind once for all, my boy."

"Is that your little boy, Wellander," one of the other men called out at that moment. "Let us have a look at him."

Hand-shakings and head-pattings followed as Keith was presented to "Uncle" This and "Uncle" That. He didn't object and he didn't care. They looked

nice enough, and their talk was friendly, but somehow he felt that his parents did not care for them. Some of the glamour had left the place. In spite of its magnificence, he did not like it, although he was glad to have seen it.

Discovering a wastepaper basket full of envelopes with brightly coloured marks on them, he regained his interest a little. He knew those marks for stamps and they had pictures on them which attracted him very much. So he made a bee-line for the basket and proceeded to pick out what he liked best.

"Have you forgotten what I told you," he heard his father shout to him.

"They have been thrown away," he said going toward the father.

"That is neither here nor there," was the sharp answer he got. "You know they are not yours, and so you must not touch them. Put them back at once."

Keith did as he was told, wondering if he really had done anything wrong or if his father merely objected for some reason of his own.

Then he walked around uninterested and forlorn until they were ready to go home again. The stairway seemed shorter as they descended, but the pillars were tall and thick as before. And on the way home his father found a little shop open and bought him a few *öre's* worth of hard candy.

It was the only time Keith could ever remember his having done such a thing.

XX

THE lodger happened to be away when they got home, and the mother had opened the door to the parlour in order to get a little more air and light into the living-room. After dinner the father went into the parlour to take a nap on the big sofa, while the mother settled down comfortably in her easy chair, a piece of handiwork on her lap as usual. Keith took up his customary position on the footstool to tell her what he had seen and done during his morning excursion.

She was eager to hear everything and helped him along with questions, and yet there ran through her very eagerness a subtle inner resistance which the boy felt vaguely. It was as if she never really cared for anything concerning him in which she herself had not taken part.

The original glamour had returned to every aspect of his new experience, and he tried excitedly to describe the wonders of the vestibule, the stairway and the big hall. In the midst of it he paused suddenly and fell to staring into vacancy.

"Was that all," she asked, puzzled by his silence.

"Lena dusts our rooms, doesn't she," was his rather startling counter-question.

"Mostly," the mother replied with a searching glance at his puckered brows. "Although I sometimes . . ."

"You don't have to," the boy broke in.

"No," she admitted, "but then I am sure it is properly done."

"Is that why papa dusts the tables in the bank?"

A pause followed during which it was the mother's turn to stand the boy's intense scrunity.

"No," she said at last. "He does it because it is a part of his work, and a shame it is that he has to. Scrub-women come in and do the rest of the cleaning, but they are not trusted with the desks, and so the attendants have to take turns doing that part of it. That's why your father has to leave so very early in the morning."

Mother and son lapsed into silence once more. It was broken by another question from the boy.

"Why couldn't I take some stamps that had been thrown away?"

"Had your father said anything about it before you took them?"

"He told me not to touch anything."

"Then you couldn't because he had told you to leave things alone. He is so careful in all such matters. Sometimes he goes a little too far, perhaps, but you can be sure that he means right. Other people want the stamps, and there is a lot of gossip and envy about everything, and he is too proud to be dragged into that sort of thing. It is always better, Keith, to leave alone what you know is not your own. Honesty endures beyond all else."

Keith made no direct response, but sprang one more irrelevant question:

"Why didn't papa get the grocery store?"

"How do you know," the mother demanded with a quick glance at him.

"Papa told me."

"Well," she drawled as if thinking. Then she settled back in the chair, her mind made up. "Listen, and I will tell you a story. Once upon a time there was a rich old man who owned a grocery store."

"That's where they sell prunes and raisins and sugar," the boy put in.

"And the store was so fine," she went on unheedingly, "that the old man was permitted to sell all those things to the king's own kitchen. The old man had many assistants, but at the head of them all was a young man who knew just what to do, because he had worked in such stores ever since he was a little boy. And he was so honest and able and polite that the people liked him very much and came to the store for his sake, but the old man liked him more than anybody else."

"Was the old man nice," Keith asked.

"Yes, indeed, but he was also very peculiar, and the most peculiar thing about him was that he hated all women and thought that a man who married was lost for ever."

"Did he have any children?"

"No, men who want no wives get no children. That is a part of their punishment. And so when the owner of the store got older and older, and began to feel tired, he didn't know to whom he should leave the store. You may be sure that he thought it over many times, because he was exceedingly proud of the store and wanted it to go on. The result of his thinking was that he decided to give it to the young man whom he trusted and liked so much."

"How did the young man look," Keith broke in.

"Something like your father, I should say. But while all this was going on, the young man had met a princess and fallen in love with her. . . ."

"A real princess," asked the boy with wide-open eyes.

"All princesses are real in their own opinion. And she and the young man had promised to marry each other, and this the old man learned at last. Then he got very, very angry and told the young man that he was a fool. And when the young man answered that there were many of his kind, and that he had pledged his word, the old man told him that he would not get the store unless he promised to have nothing more to do with the princess. But the young man loved her and would not give her up, and so, you see—he didn't get the store. Don't you think that was nobly done, Keith?"

"Ye-es," the boy assented without particular enthusiasm, "but if he had got the store, we should have been rich now?"

"We," repeated the mother in a funny tone. "Why, then there would have been no *we*."

"Why not," he demanded.

"Or it might have been worse still," she whispered as if momentarily forgetful of the boy's presence.

"There is your father now," she said a moment later, when a slight stir was heard in the adjoining room. "Don't say anything more about the store. . . . Do you know what your father wanted to be most of all?"

Keith looked up speculatively as his father appeared in the doorway to the parlour—a man of medium height, who stooped because he was nearsighted,

and so looked shorter than he was, but also stronger because of the great width of his shoulders.

"I can tell you," the father put in. "When I couldn't study, I wanted to be a sailor, and I tried to take hire on a ship whose master knew me and wished to help me. Then they found out that I was too nearsighted to steer by the compass, and that was the end of it. Didn't I tell you that I was born under the Monkey Star?"

"Don't talk like that, Carl," the mother protested, rising to give him a kiss. "You have done very well, and there is no man in the bank more respected than you."

"Yes," he admitted with something like a grin. "They know I wouldn't steal even if I had a chance, and they let me collect four million crowns, as I did the other day, but I shall never get beyond where I am today. So there you are—what's struck for a farthing will never be a dollar."

Keith's head was still full of what he had heard when he went to bed that night, and he didn't know whether to feel happy or unhappy about it. His father had grown bigger and more interesting in some ways, and yet the boy's chief impression was of a failure and a fall. It was this impression that stuck most deeply in his mind.

XXI

KEITH'S home was not one of those hospitable places with the doors always wide open, to which people are drawn almost against their will and from which they come away with difficulty. Perhaps it was, above all, the spirit of the father that settled this matter. To him, more than to any Englishman, his home was his castle, and he liked to keep the drawbridge raised against unwelcome company. And most company seemed unwelcome, although at times, when the right persons appeared at the right moment, he could be happy as a child and unbend in a manner that made Keith gape with wonder. When her good mood prevailed, the mother, too, was touchingly eager for the diversion provided by a chance visit, but when the dark moments came, she shunned everybody, while at the same time she watched any prolonged failure to call with morbid suspiciousness, ascribing it promptly to a sense of superiority toward herself and her family. Granny was glad enough to talk to anybody, but she would never ask any one to call, and if no one came, she was apt to dig out some particularly bitter proverb, like "money alone has many friends."

Both parents could be hospitable enough when occasion so demanded, but it was a formal thing with them, exercised only after due preparation. In many ways, they were large-heartedly generous, but only in

a serious manner, when actual need required it. They might give freely beyond what they could well afford, but the father could be out of humour for days if some little thing regarded as particularly his own had been touched or used by another member of the family.

As it was, people came and went a good deal, but they came formally or because some specific errand brought them, and most of the errands, Keith soon realized, were connected with a desire for help. The old women living like nightbirds in the garret, would drop in frequently, and almost invariably with some tale of woe that sooner or later drew from the mother relief in one form or another. And one of Keith's earliest tasks, half coveted and half feared, was to walk up to one of the attics with a plate of soup or a saucer full of jam or some other tidbit. Others would come from the outside, and they, too, were mostly old women. They always wanted to pat Keith, and he objected passionately to all of them. His especial aversion was a gaunt old woman with a big hooked nose and a pair of startlingly large, sad-looking eyes. She always smiled, and her smile was hopelessly out of keeping with the rest of her face. The very sight of her made Keith forget all his manners. Time and again his mother rebuked him and tried to bring him around by telling the old woman's story—a story of wonderful self-sacrifice and heroic struggle—but it made no difference to him. There was something about the sight of poverty and unhappiness and failure that provoked him beyond endurance, and sometimes he would turn to his mother with a reckless cry of:

"Why do you let them come here at all?"

For the friends of the family, who came there on an equal footing, he showed more respect, and for a few of them he felt a real liking. As a rule, however, they inspired him with nothing but indifference, and his one reason for greeting them with some approach at cordiality was that they brought a change into the general monotony of the home, and that their coming might lead to the distribution of some dainties out of the ordinary. Some of his parents' friends were poor and growing poorer. Others had the appearance of doing well and hoping for more. It made no difference to Keith. They were all middle-aged, sedate and preoccupied with their own little affairs. They tried to be nice to him, but they did not interest him, and his main grievance against them—not clearly understood by any means—was that they brought nothing into his life of what he wanted.

Had he been asked what he wanted, he would have answered unhesitatingly:

"Some one to play with."

XXII

HAVING whined and nagged until his mother no longer could bear it, Keith at last obtained the cherished permission to go and play in the lane.

"But look out for horses," warned his mother as he stood in the doorway ready to run. "And don't run

out of sight, and you must come when I call, and—you had better keep away from other boys, or you may come home quite naked this time."

"What do you mean," asked Keith, turning to see whether the mother was joking or talking seriously.

"Don't you recall when those boys took your coat from you, and you came up here crying?"

There could be no mistake about her meaning just what she said. Keith stood still thinking very hard. Here was another memory that he could not remember at all. There was not a trace of it left in his mind, and yet it must have happened. It sounded exciting, too, and he wished to know all about it.

"You had better close the door," his mother suggested.

"All right," said Keith, hastening to close the door from the outside and make a dive for the stairway. There would be plenty of time to ask about the loss of his coat later. He was halfway down the first flight when he heard the kitchen door open behind him, and his heart leapt into his throat.

"You must go down the stairs quietly," his mother called out from above, whereupon Keith's heart resumed its normal position.

He descended the rest of that flight on tip-toe. The second one was taken more rapidly, and down the last one he went two steps at a time, the little iron plates under his heels hitting the stones with a ring that echoed through the old house.

In the lane he found them loading a dray in front of the distillery, and he started across to watch the men straining at the next barrel. He had hardly taken a step in that direction, however, when a loud pop was

heard from the black cave forming the entrance to the distillery. It was followed first by a single cry, and then by a hubbub of voices. A second later a young man came running out and threw himself prone into the gutter, where a trickle of water was to be seen.

Keith was too astonished to be frightened at once. He could not understand what made the man act in that way. Then another man came out in a rush and began to beat the legs of the man in the gutter with his hands, and Keith suddenly noticed that little blue flames were dancing up and down the grimy leathern trousers of the first man.

The memory of the night when the church burned leaped into his mind, making him turn instinctively toward the passageway and his mother's lap.

At that moment a third man appeared carrying a big tank full of water which he poured over the man in the gutter. The latter got on his feet and limped back into the distillery, supported by his two comrades.

Keith was left behind, trembling a little and gazing curiously at the hanging head of the dray-horse which had not made the slightest movement during the previous excitement.

"He'll have to go to bed," said a sleepy voice at his shoulder just then.

Keith swung around as if touched by an electric shock. Before him he saw another small boy, apparently of his own age, but a little taller, and light-haired like himself.

"What's your name," asked Keith as soon as he caught his breath.

"Johan," answered the other stolidly, but not unfriendly.

"Have you got another name like me?"

"My name is Johan Peter Gustafsson," was the reply given in the tone of a lesson painfully learned.

"Where do you live?"

"Right here."

"Not in our house," Keith protested.

"No, down there," Johan explained, pointing to the little side door leading into the courtyard of one of the corner houses at the Quay.

"What's your father?" Keith continued his cross-examination.

"Vaktmästare," said Johan indifferently.

"So is mine," Keith cried eagerly. "Have you got a bank, too?"

Johan shook his head as if unable to grasp what Keith meant.

"My popsey works in the office down there," he said, "and we live beside it, and at night I go with popsey when he carries all the mail to the postoffice."

"Why do you call him popsey," inquired Keith, fascinated by the new word and wondering if he would dare use it to his own father.

"Because that's what he is," Johan declared.

A few minutes later they were playing together as if they had known each other for ever. They had just discovered an unusually large and tempting pin in a crack at the bottom of the gutter, when Keith heard his mother calling from the window above:

"What are you doing, Keith?"

"Oh, just playing," he replied without looking up forgetful of everything but the pin that would not come out of the crack.

"Who is that with you?"

"That is Johan," Keith shouted back triumphantly, "and his papa is a *vaktmästare,* too."

"Come right up and let me speak to you," was the instant rejoinder from above.

"Oh, please, mamma," the boy pleaded, his voice breaking a little, "can't I stay just a little longer?"

"You must come at once," his mother commanded.

"Is that your mumsey," Johan asked.

"It is my mamma," Keith retorted, his attention momentarily diverted by Johan's most peculiar way of referring to his parents.

"Then you had better go," advised the new friend sagely, "or she will tell your popsey, and then you know what happens to you."

"I think I can come down again, if you wait for me," cried Keith as he ran into the long dark passageway.

At that moment a cry of "Johan" rose from the lower part of the lane, and Keith had to come back once more to look.

"There's my mumsey now," said Johan philosophically, pointing to an open window on the ground floor of the corner house. With that he slouched off in a manner that Keith half envied and half resented.

XXIII

THE sudden emergence of Johan had filled Keith's heart with a new hope. Here was a possible playmate at last. The fact that his father was a *vaktmästare* like Keith's ought to settle

all paternal opposition, the boy thought. But to his great surprise, he found this not to be the case.

A severe cross-examination followed his return home. In the midst of it, Keith made a grievous strategic mistake, lured on by his insatiable curiosity about strange words.

"Why does Johan call his mamma 'mumsey' and his papa 'popsey,'" he asked unexpectedly. "It sounds funny."

"Because he does not know any better," his mother rejoined with unmistakable disapproval. "It doesn't sound nice, and it isn't nice."

"But his papa and mamma don't care," Keith objected.

"That's the worst of it," said the mother. "It shows they are not very nice people, and I wish to talk to your father before you can play with Johan any more."

"I have heard of them," the grandmother piped up, making them both turn towards her, one hopefully and the other doubtfully.

The grandmother never left the kitchen. She walked from the sofa to the big foot-stool, from the foot-stool to the table by the window, and from the table back to the sofa. Sometimes she would not be seen talking to another person for days. And yet she had a miraculous way of surprising the rest of the family with pieces of gossip picked out of the air, one might think. There was apparently not a person in the neighbourhood of whom she had not heard, and about whom she could not give some more or less intimate piece of information. They were all perfect

strangers to her, but she followed their lives with as much keenness for minute details as if they had been her nearest kin or dear friends.

"She was a cook in the house of the man whose office Gustafsson works in," the grandmother went on. "He used to do odd jobs for the family, cutting wood and such things, and in that way he met her in the kitchen, and one fine day they decided to get married. She is older than him, and I guess it was her last chance. But the family was crazy about her, and when they heard of it, they gave him the place of attendant in the office downstairs and the two rooms back of the office to live in. He was just a peasant boy, and she reads the Bible all day and goes to prayer-meeting at night."

"How do you know all that," wondered Keith's mother, having learned by this time that the old woman's gossip was generally well founded on truth.

"Oh," the grandmother said with a queer smile particular to such occasions, "a little bird sang it to me."

"I think they must be rather low people," Keith's mother concluded.

"Perhaps," the grandmother said, "but they have plenty of religion at least, and I don't think the boy can do much harm to Keith."

Keith ran up to the grandmother and kissed her impulsively.

That night there was a great family council. Keith's father was told about Johan and the Gustafssons.

"I think they are about as good as ourselves," was his verdict, given in a tone suggesting contempt for his

own position rather than respect for that of Johan's father. "But Keith has his toys, and that ought to be enough for him."

"It *is* rather lonely for him," the mother rejoined, "and he should get out a little, I suppose, but I hate to have him playing about the streets, and I fear Johan's manners are not very good."

"The best thing is to send him to school," said the father.

"What are you talking of, Carl," the mother cried. "The idea—when he is barely five!"

"He knows more about the letters than I did when I began school at seven," the father came back unperturbed.

"I don't think it would be very bad for him to play a little with Johan now and then," said the mother evasively, bending down to kiss Keith, who had snuggled up to her during the preceding talk. Then she put her hand through his waves of almost flaxen hair, bent his head slightly backward, looked straight into his eyes, and asked:

"You don't want to leave me, do you?"

"No," said Keith, hugging her passionately, "but I think I should like to go to school."

The idea carried no distinct image to his mind, and he felt a little timid toward all those unknown possibilities implied by the word school, but this slight feeling of hesitation was swamped by a longing so restless and so irresistible that it sent tears to his eyes, although he could not tell himself what it was he longed for.

XXIV

IT was true that Keith knew a good deal for his age. In fact, he had mastered the whole alphabet and was making good progress in spelling under his mother's guidance. He was eager and quick to learn. Generally his interest was rather fitful, but along this one line it showed no wavering. It was as if the boy had known that the art of reading would offer him an escape of some sort.

He might have advanced still more rapidly if his mother had been more steady in her teaching. She was very proud of him, and she spoke of reading and studying as if there were nothing finer in the world.

"No better burden bears any man than much wisdom," she quoted one day from the old Eddas—probably without knowing the source. "I know, if any one does, what lack of money means, but I want you rather to have learning than wealth. Then, when the whole world is listening to you with bated breath, I shall walk across North Bridge resting on your arm, and I shall be repaid for all that my own life has not brought me. We shall walk arm in arm, you and I, at four o'clock, when the King goes for a walk, too, and all Stockholm is there to see. . . . Will you do that, Keith?"

"Of course," he cried, his eyes shining.

But sometimes she was helpless in the grip of one of

her depressed moods, and then days might go by without a lesson. Far from being made happy by that respite, he would plead with her to be taught "one more little letter," and finally she would bring down the book from the hanging book shelf on the wall back of her easy chair. There stood the a-b-c book she had bought for him, and her favourite hymn-book, and the New Testament given to the father when he left school to begin earning his own living, and the miniature copy of Luther's catechism presented to him at the time of his confirmation. There, too, rested the big Bible which Keith's mother treasured as much as her wedding ring and the bureau that was her chief wedding present. It was a gift from her father when she was confirmed, and on its fly-leaf he had written:

"Belongs to Anna Margareta Carlsson."

It was this Bible rather than the a-b-c book that became the principal means of instruction. Keith loved it, and he could not have been much more than three years old when he first began to pore over its quaint old illustrations. The first of these showed an old man with a long beard and a trailing white garment floating over a sheet of water out of which rose two ragged pieces of rock. At one corner a pallid sun emerged out of the fleeing mists, while, at the opposite corner, a tiny moon crescent seemed about to disappear beneath the stilled waters.

"Who is that," asked Keith not once, but many times.

"That is God creating the world," explained his mother.

"But I don't see the world."

"It is just coming out," she said, pointing to the rocks.

"Who's God," was Keith's next question as a rule.

"He is the father of the whole universe," the mother said reverently.

"Papa's too," asked the boy once, and seeing his mother nod assent, he cried jubilantly:

"Then he must be my grandfather, whose portrait you haven't got!"

More frequently he stopped short as soon as he heard about the universal fatherhood. That was grown-up talk to him, and like much else, it carried no meaning to his mind. Nor did he waste much thought on it after having asked once if he could see God and been told that no man could do that and live. His mind was occupied with food and clothes and toys and people and things. What could never be seen was easily dismissed—much more easily than the spook which one of the servant girls insisted on having seen, thus making Keith's father so angry that he nearly discharged her on the spot. And from that first picture in the Bible the boy turned impatiently to another further on, where a small boy with a sword almost as big as himself was cutting the head off a man much taller than Keith's father. And at the top of each page appeared big black letters which he could recognize almost as easily as those in the a-b-c book, although they were differently shaped and much more pretty to look at.

To Keith this opening up of a new world was exclusively pleasant at first, and so it was to his mother, but other people seemed to be troubled by it at times.

One day his free-spoken aunt was visiting with them, and, as usual, disagreeing with Keith's mother, who evidently felt one of her dark spells approaching. Wishing to express her disagreement at some particular point quite forcibly, but wishing also to keep the listening boy from enriching his vocabulary with a term of doubtful desirability, she took the precaution to spell out the too picturesque word:

"R-o-t!" Just then she caught a gleam of aroused interest in Keith's eyes, and to make assurance doubly sure, she hastened to add: "Says rod!"

"No," Keith objected promptly. "It says rot, and I want to know what it means."

"I knew that small pigs also have ears, but I didn't know they could spell," was her amused comment, uttered in a tone that touched something in Keith's inside most pleasantly. Then, however, she went on in a manner grown quite serious:

"You had better send him to school, Anna."

"Yes," replied the mother to Keith's intense surprise, "Carl and I have been talking it over and practically decided to do so. He certainly needs some better guidance than he gets from his poor, good-for-nothing mother."

"Good-for-nothing fiddlesticks!" sputtered the aunt. "You'll make me say something much worse than rot, Anna, if you keep talking like that when the boy hears it."

Keith had heard, but his mind was absorbed by the new idea.

"Well," said his mother, "I cannot take care of him properly. He is running down to that Gustafsson boy

all the time and most of the time I can't get him home again except by going for him."

"Johan's mother said yesterday that I hadn't been there half an hour when you called for me," Keith broke in. "And then she said that I had better not come back if you don't think Johan good enough for me to play with."

"I don't say we are better than anybody else," said the mother, addressing herself to the aunt rather than to Keith. "But I don't know what he is doing when he is down there, and Johan seems such a clod that I can't see why Keith wants to play with him."

"Why can't Johan come up here," asked Keith.

"Because . . . ," said his mother, and got no further.

"Yes," the aunt declared in a tone of absolute finality, "you must send him to school."

No sooner had the aunt taken her leave than Keith assailed his mother with excited demands for further information. She took his head between her both hands and looked at him as if she would never see him again.

"Only five," she said at last, "and already he wants to get away. A few years more—a few short years—and you will be gone for good, I suppose."

"Oh, mamma," he protested, "you know that I shall never leave you!"

"No, never entirely," she cried, kissing him fervently. "Promise me you won't, Keith!"

He promised, and then he wanted to know what they did in school. But she began to talk about difficulties and dangers and temptations and all sorts of things he

couldn't grasp. She spoke with intense feeling, and as always when she was deeply moved, his whole being was set vibrating in tune with her mood. His cheeks flushed, his throat choked, his eyes brimmed over with tears, and at last he began to wonder whether he had not better stay right where he was. Her eyes were dim with tears, too, and once more she took his head between her hands and looked an endless time before she said:

"Now you are beginning life in earnest, Keith!"

PART II

I

ONE day in the early autumn Keith's mother dressed him with unusual care and kissed him several times before they left the house. Granny had to be kissed, too, and even Lena came forward to shake hands and say good-bye. It was a very solemn affair.

Hand in hand Keith and his mother walked clear cross the old City, past Great Church, until they came o a very broad lane at the foot of which was a square ith a statue in it. At the other end of the square lay very large, red building.

"That's the House of Knights where all the nobility ang up their coats-of-arms," said the mother.

But Keith was too excited to ask any questions at hat moment.

They entered a house much finer and neater than heir own and stopped in front of a door on the second oor. A hubbub of shrill voices could be heard from ithin. Keith gripped his mother's hand more firmly.

Then the door was opened by a white-haired lady ith spectacles and they were admitted to a large room, ontaining a score of little boys and girls. A dead lence fell on the room as they appeared, and every ye turned toward Keith, who blushed furiously as as his wont whenever he found himself observed.

After a brief talk with the teacher, Keith's mother id to him:

"This is Aunt Westergren, whom you must obey a you obey me. And now be a good boy and don't cry."

As the mother tarried by the door for a moment t exchange a last word with the teacher, and perhaps als to cast one more lingering glance at the boy, a littl girl ran up to Keith, put her right fore-finger on to of his head and cried out:

"Towhead!"

All the other children giggled. Keith blushed mor deeply than ever, but did not say a word or stir a limb A moment later the teacher began to cross-questio him about his knowledge of letters and spelling, and h found it much easier to answer her than to face th children. But, of course, after a while he was quite a home among them without knowing how it had hap pened.

That afternoon his mother came for him. The nex morning he had to start out alone under direct order from the father, and alone he made his way hom again, his bosom swelling with a sense of wonderful in dependence. Years passed before he learned that hi mother had watched over him for days before she wa fully convinced of his ability to find the way by himself

The autumn passed. Winter and spring came an went. It was summer again. The little school closed Keith could read the head-lines at the tops of the page in the big Bible without help. But of the schoo where he had learned it hardly a memory remained It was as if the place had made no impression whatso ever on his mind. And the children with whom h studied and played nearly a whole year might as wel have been dreams, forgotten at the moment of wak ing—all but one of them.

Harald alone seemed a real, living thing, a part of Keith's own life, but not a part of the school where the two boys met daily. He was a year older than Keith, a little slow mentally, but rather unusually advanced in other ways. His father was a merchant of some sort, with an office of his own and half a dozen clerks at his command, and Harald had been taught to regard himself as a young gentleman. They lived a few houses from the school, in the same street, and their home was a revelation to Keith.

Houses less fortunate than his own were familiar to him, but he had never seen a better one until he was asked to visit Harald for the first time, and the comparisons made on that occasion stuck deeply in his mind.

They entered through a hallway where caps and coats were left behind, and from there they went into a room where every piece of furniture was of mahogany. Between the windows hung a mirror in a gilded frame that was as tall as the room itself, so that Keith could see himself from head to foot. The object that caught the boy's attention most of all, however, was a chandelier suspended from the middle of the ceiling and made up of hundreds of little rods of glass. As Harald slammed the door on entering, some of the rods were set in motion and struck against each other with a tiny tinkle that seemed to Keith the most beautiful sound he had ever heard.

That room, Harald said, was used only to receive visitors, and he gave Keith to understand that there were any number of other rooms on both sides of it. One of these was Harald's own and used by nobody else. He could even lock the door of it on the inside,

if he wanted. There they played with tin soldier several inches high, and Harald had a little cannon ou of which they could shoot dry peas, so that it wa possible to fight a real battle by dividing the soldier and taking turns of using the cannon. Finally Har ald's mother appeared with a bowl of fruit and greete the visitor with a certain searching kindness that mad him a little uneasy in the midst of all his enjoyment.

Keith returned home that day much later than usua to find his mother in a state of frantic worry. A first she declared that he must not go anywhere withou her knowing about it in advance, but after a while sh became quite interested and palpably elated by Keith' tale of all the glories he had seen. She explained tha the glass rods on the chandeliers were prisms tha showed the whole rainbow when you held them in fron of a light, and she asked him eagerly if he had been in vited to come again. But when the father heard of i that night, he said:

"I don't think Keith should go there at all. H can't ask such a boy over here, and the next thing w know, Keith's own home will no longer be good enoug for him."

Keith could hardly believe his ears. He had neve felt such resentment against his father, and just befor going to bed, while the father was out of the room fo a moment, he whispered to his mother:

"I think papa does not want me to have any fun!"

"You don't understand," she retorted. "He mean well. Remember what Granny says: Equals mak the best playmates."

Three or four times Keith went home with Harald Then the gates of paradise were suddenly slammed i

his face. One day, as they were leaving school together, Harald remarked quite calmly:

"You can't come home with me any more."

"Why," gasped Keith, his throat choking.

"Because mamma says I must find some one else to play with," Harald explained. Then he softened a little: "I can't help it, and I like you."

"But why," insisted Keith on the verge of tears.

"You look like a nice boy, mamma says, but your father is nothing but a *vaktmästare,* and mine is a *grosshandlare* (wholesale dealer)."

Keith walked home in a stupor and began to cry the moment he saw his mother. Her lips tightened and her face grew white as she listened to the story he sobbed forth.

"Now you can see that your father was right," she said at last. "Of course, we are just as good as anybody else, but others don't think so—because we are poor. But we have our pride, and you had better stay home and play with your own soldiers hereafter. Then I don't have to worry about you either."

But Keith had very little pride. He continued to seek Harald's company as before, and twice, as they were about to part in front of the latter's house, Keith asked if he couldn't come up and play for a little while.

"Don't you understand," Harald asked the second time, "that my mamma does not think you good enough for me to play with?"

Keith had not thought of it in that way. He had learned that there were people who looked down on his parents, just as they, in their turn, looked down on the parents of Johan, but the idea that he himself might be regarded equally inferior was entirely new to

him. It was so strange to him that it took him year to grasp it. And when it came into his mind, he felt a if some one had raised a heavy stick to strike him, an he cowered under the impending blow.

II

CHRISTMAS was approaching.

The days grew shorter and shorter, until a last a scant four hours of daylight remaine around noon. Even then a lamp was often needed fo reading.

The lead-coloured sky nearly touched the roofs. Th drizzle that filled the air most of the time seemed t enter men's minds, too, sapping their vigour until lif became a burden. Meeting on the streets, they woul cry in irritable tones:

"When will the snow come?"

It was always a tedious time for Keith. The inc dent with Harald made it worse this year. Except fo the daily attendance at school, he was virtually a pri oner. Johan was to be seen only from the windov whence Keith enviously watched him prowling abou the lane, his hands buried in the side-pockets of an ol coat much too long—apparently inherited from som one else—and his shoulders hunched as if fore-destine to support loads of wood like those his father used t carry. If no one was in the living-room, Keith migh shout a greeting to his playmate below, but it was no

much fun, and Johan had a contemptuous way of asking why he did not come out and play.

Yet the season was not without its compensations. Stores of every kind were laid in to last through the winter. One might have thought that a severance of communications with the outside world was feared. Keith marvelled at the magnificence of it, and once in a while he asked why it had to be done. The answers were unsatisfactory. The main reason was that it had always been done, but he gathered also that, while it was perfectly respectable to live from day to day during the summer, to do so during the winter would be a distinct proof of social and economic inferiority.

The fire wood came first—a mighty load of birch logs piled along the house front in the lane. Two men were busy all day with saw and ax, reducing those logs into pieces matching the fire-places in the kitchen stove and the two glazed brick ovens in the living-room and the parlour. Two more men piled the pieces into huge sacks and staggered with those on their backs up the five flights of stairs to the top garret under the peak of the house, which belonged to the Wellanders. Keith would stand in the kitchen door watching them. First he heard the slow clamp-clamp of ascending boot-steps. Then the man's heavy breathing became audible, and Keith felt as if the load was resting on his own shoulders. Finally the open top of the bag, with its bright stuffing of newly cut birch wood, showed at the corner of the landing quite a long time before the head beneath it came into sight. As the man crossed the landing in front of Keith, bent almost double under his burden, a dew of pungent perspiration would drop on the slate-coloured stones, leaving behind a curious

path of round spots. Not a word was said at tha time, but coming down the men would sometimes throw a crude jest to the bright-eyed watcher or stop to refil their mouths with snuff out of a little thin brass bo with a mirror fitted to the inside of its cover. Th sight of the snuff filled Keith with a sense of loathing although his father used to put a pinch of it into hi nostrils now and then, and more than anything else i seemed to mark a distinction between himself and thos people from a world far beneath his own. Theirs wa a racking job, heavier than any other known to th boy, and one day he asked his mother:

"Why do they care to carry all that wood for us?"

"Because we pay them, and because they are might glad to get the money. Otherwise they couldn't live."

"And where does the wood come from?"

"The bank sends it as part of papa's pay."

Once more Keith was so impressed with the miracu lous power of that mysterious being which his fathe served and cursed and worshipped that his mother' previous answer was lost for the time being. But it re curred to his mind later and connected with his father' talk of making him a carpenter. A strong prejudic against manual labour was shaping itself in his mind

After the wood came the victuals: a tub of butte reaching Keith to the chin; bags of flour; barrels o potatoes and apples; hams and haunches of dried mut ton and smoked reindeer meat; and lastly packages o smaller size and sundry contents that the mothe promptly carried to the pantry inside the parlour with out letting Keith touch them.

This year—it was the winter following the Franco Prussian war—the preparations were rendered uncon

monly impressive by the addition of a cheese large as the moon at full. There was always plenty of cheese of various kinds in the house: whole milk cheese carefully aged until its flavour was like that of English Stilton or Italian Gorgonzola; skim milk cheese stuffed with cloves and cardamon seeds; and dark brown goat milk cheese of a cloying sweetness that Keith detested.

Cheese was more than a taste with Keith's father. It was a hobby, and one of his few pastimes was to skirmish in strange little shops for some particularly old and strong-smelling piece at a reasonable price. When he brought home a bargain of that kind, he acted like a bibliophile having just captured a rare first edition for a song, and the mother tried hard to share his enthusiasm. But, she said once, she had to draw the line at cheese that walked by itself. Half in jest and half in earnest, the father maintained that the maggots were the very essence of the cheese, and that to remove them was to lose the finest flavour. This year the father had bought a whole fresh cheese in order to age it at home and thus save money in two ways, the price being proportionate to the age.

The same large-handed system prevailed in other things, though the parents often spoke of their poverty, and though their resources undoubtedly were very limited. Shirts, table-ware, bed-linen, china, etc., must needs be acquired in round numbers. To have less than a dozen of anything was to have nothing at all. The breaking of a cup was a family disaster if it could not be replaced. Everything had to be in sets, and to preserve these intact, the utmost care was preached and exercised. It bred thrift and orderliness, but also an undue regard for property.

Finally came the time for baking and other direc preparations for a holiday season that in the good ol days used to last from Christmas Eve to January 13th known as the Twentieth Christmas Day, when every body "danced the Yule out." What interested Keith most in this part of the proceedings was the making o gingersnaps according to a recipe transmitted to hi mother from bygone generations and cherished by he as a precious family secret. A whole day was se aside for the purpose and at the end of it they had a big, bulging earthen jar filled to the brim. Keith used to boast to other children of those dainties that, i addition to their taste, had the fascination of many dif ferent shapes—hearts, crowns, lilies, clubs, diamonds baskets, and so on. They really deserved all the praise they got, and he had so little to boast of on the whole. The jar stood on the floor in the pantry back of the parlour, and once in a while Keith found hi way to it without maternal permission, although, as a rule, he was little given to lawbreaking.

One morning three or four days before Christma Lena was heard calling from the kitchen:

"Keith, Keith, come and look!"

Eager as always when the slightest excitement wa promised, the boy started so suddenly that his littl table was upset with its whole population of tin soldier and his mother was moved to remark that "it was n use behaving as if the house were on fire."

"Look at the snow," said Lena, pointing to the win dow when Keith reached the kitchen, relieved at no having had to pick up the spilled toys before he coul go.

Huge, wet, feathery flakes were dropping lazily from the sky. Little by little they increased in numbers and fell more quickly. At last they formed a moving veil through which the building at the other end of the courtyard could barely be seen.

Later in the day Keith was permitted to look out through one of the front windows. The whole world had changed and looked much brighter in spite of the failing light. The Quay was covered by a carpet of white that made the waters beyond look doubly dark and cold. The trees on the opposite shore looked as if they had been painted from the topmost twig to the root. Down in the lane, two of the workers in the distillery were pelting each other with snowballs, while a third one was shouting at the top of his voice:

"We'll have a white Christmas this year, thank heaven."

That same evening Keith's long cherished dream of visiting the open-air Christmas Fair at Great Square was to come true at last. Like other affairs of its kind, it had been reduced by the modern shop to a mere shadow of its former glorious self, and it was kept up only out of regard for ancient tradition. Keith had been told that it was nothing but a lot of open booths displaying cheap toys and cheaper candy. To Keith toys were toys and candy candy, no matter what the price and quality, and so he kept on begging leave to go, until the night in question his parents, who were going out with friends, deemed it better to let him see for himself. And so Lena was ordered to take charge of the expedition.

Lena and Keith were dressed and ready to start when the mother came into the kitchen to give the boy a farewell kiss as usual. He was in high spirits, but fidgety with some unexpressed wish.

"What is it, Keith," asked the mother, recognizing the symptoms.

"I want some money," he whispered into her ear.

"Go and ask papa."

"No, you ask him."

That was what always happened, and in the end the mother voiced the boy's plea to the father, who just then appeared in the door to the living-room. He was in a good humour and promptly reached into his pocket. Unfortunately Keith discovered at that crucial moment that one of his shoe laces had become untied.

"Please, mamma, help me," he said, putting his foot on a chair to enable her to reach it more easily.

"That settles it," exclaimed the father with a darkening face as he handed Keith a few small copper coins. "That is all you will get now. A boy of five who makes his mother tie his shoe strings ought not to have anything at all."

Keith took the coins silently and went with Lena to the fair, but he saw nothing worth seeing, and he never wanted to go again. Uneasily he prowled among the booths trying as a matter of duty to find something so cheap that his scant hoard would buy it. At last he succeeded in getting a little box of tin soldiers of poorest quality for one-third less than the price put on it. It was one of the few times in his life when he found himself able to haggle over the cost of a thing.

From the first he found fault with the new addition to his army, and one day not long afterwards he

charged the whole regiment with cowardice in the face of the enemy. A drumhead court martial was held on the spot, and the verdict was a foregone conclusion. The culprits were found guilty in a body and sentenced to immediate execution. Then Keith possessed himself surreptitiously of the family hammer, and when his mother came to investigate the noise he was making, the whole offensive regiment had been reduced to scraps. Never before or after did Keith as a general go to such extremes on behalf of military morale.

But many, many years later, when he stopped for the first time at a typical English hotel, he found himself horribly embarrassed by the assistance forced on him by the obligatory valet.

III

IN Sweden the principal celebration with its distribution of gifts takes place late on Christmas Eve.

Long before that day Keith began to watch every package brought into the house. Soon he noticed several that disappeared quickly without having been opened. Nor did it take his shrewd little mind long to figure out that they must have been stowed away on the upper shelf of the pantry back of the parlour. This was an excellent hiding-place because the shelf in question was fully six feet above the floor and on a level with the lintel of the doorway, so that its contents seemed as much out of reach as they were out of sight from below.

One day, however, Keith succeeded in getting into the parlour when both parents were out. The night before his father had come home with an unusually large and queerly shaped package under his arm and had taken it straight into the parlour. The boy's curiosity was at fever heat and got the better of his customary inertia in the face of explicit prohibitions. Having dragged a heavy wooden chair into the pantry, he placed its tall back directly against the shelves. The crosspieces in the back of the chair formed rungs on which he climbed up to the top shelf. It was quite a feat for a very small boy, but the slight timidity that characterized him as a rule was totally forgotten for the time.

There was the mystifying package together with many others. He could even touch it with his hand. In spite of its size, it was very light. It was wider at the bottom than at the top, and it sounded hollow when he knocked at it. His little brain worked at high pressure, but not a guess came out of it that was at all plausible. Finally Keith had to climb down no wiser than he was before. His failure had one advantage. It freed him from all sense of guilt. It served also to keep his expectations at an unusually high pitch, so that when the morning of the great day arrived at last, it seemed as if he were facing twelve long hours of actual torture.

Every one was very busy preparing not only for the feast of the evening, but for the two coming holidays. Christmas Day in Sweden being followed by a Second Christmas Day, equal to the first one in leisure if not in sanctity. No one had any time to spare for the boy, who found himself in the way wherever he

turned. In the end he was ordered pointblank out of the kitchen, where his mother, Granny and the servant girl needed all the space at their disposal. The door to the parlour was closed although the lodger had left town for the holidays, and so nothing but the living-room remained. There Keith whiled away the long hours in vain speculation on the contents of the mysterious package.

He tried to recall what things he had wished for during the year. He felt sure that nothing of the kind could be in the package. Any desire openly expressed was disregarded by his father, Keith thought, if not actually resented. The reason given was that a Christmas present should be a complete surprise, and if the recipient had openly asked for it, there could be no talk of surprising him. Of course, Keith could whisper what he wanted into his mother's ear now and then, but always with the provision that she must convey the proper information to the father as coming from herself.

Even this process of elimination failed, however, and so the day dragged on interminably, with no help from without for a mind weary of waiting. The customary dinner was passed up. Everybody snatched a bite off the kitchen table without breaking away from the work. Three or four times people arrived with packages from relatives or friends. Each visitor had to be treated, even though he be a stranger of the humblest character. Then dull monotony reigned once more, and Keith resumed his fidgeting back and forth between the kitchen door and his own corner. The old toys were simply unendurable. . . .

It had long been dark when the father returned home

at last, laden with parcels and tired out by personal delivery of Christmas gifts to the various members of the family. His face was slightly flushed and he talked with unusual eagerness. An atmosphere of reckless good-will surrounded him, and when he made a remark about there being no presents, even Keith knew it to be facetious.

The last hour was the longest. The father and the mother had withdrawn to the parlour and closed the door behind them. The girl was setting the table and couldn't be disturbed. Granny was nervous and irritable because she knew that she would be forced to join the rest at the table that night. Keith felt like a disembodied soul let loose in infinite space without goal or purpose.

Toward eight o'clock the parlour door opened and Keith was called in. A tiny Christmas tree stood on a table in a corner, glistening with lights and multi-coloured paper festoons. It represented a great concession, because neither one of the parents cared much for the trouble involved. If there had been a number of children in the family, they said, then it would have been another matter. The truth was that Keith didn't care very much either. He clapped hands and shouted excitedly, of course, but his glances went sideways to the big sofa, where stood a huge hamper piled to twice its own height with parcels, all wrapped in snow-white paper and sealed with red sealing wax. The air of the room was charged with the rich smell of newly melted wax, and to Keith that smell was always the essence of Christmas, its chief symbol and harbinger.

During those few minutes in the parlour a dozen tall

candles had been lighted in the living-room, transforming the place that a moment before seemed so dreary. The dining table was opened to its full length and placed across the middle of the room, at right angles to the chaiselongue where Keith slept nights. Cut glass dishes and silver-ware shone in the light reflected from the spotlessly white table cloth. In the centre stood the Christmas layer cake, its body four inches thick and its top glistening with red and yellow and green pieces of candied fruit.

Then began the little comedy regularly enacted every Christmas.

"Isn't Granny coming," the father asked. Then he turned to Lena. "Tell her we are ready."

"She says she doesn't want to come in," Lena reported after a hasty visit to the kitchen.

"You go and ask her for me, Keith," was the father's next suggestion.

"Thank you, dear," Granny said when Keith came to her with his message. "But you tell your father that I think the kitchen is a much better place for a useless old hag like myself."

"Suppose you go," the father said to his wife on hearing Keith's modified version of Granny's reply.

"She says she really won't come in," the mother explained a minute later. "You had better go out and ask her yourself, Carl. It is the one thing she cannot resist."

The father went with a broad grin on his face. Keith laughed loudly and nervously, his eyes on the huge cake. But the mother said apologetically to Lena:

"Mamma is so funny about coming in here, although she knows how much we want her."

"Here she is now," said Lena.

And the father appeared with Granny on his arm, and Granny was all dressed up in her best skirt of black silk thick as cloth, with a cap of black lace on her head.

"Really, I can't see what you want with an old thing like me in here," she continued protesting as she was being led to her seat beside Keith. The girl sat opposite Granny, and the mother beside the girl, facing Keith. The father, on that one occasion, always occupied the chaiselongue at the short end of the table, with the mother on his right and Keith on his left. Beside him stood the hamper with its mountainous pile of parcels.

Keith said grace with folded hands and bent head, and, of course, he had to say it twice because the first time he swallowed half the words in his eagerness to get through quickly. Then the meal began.

It opened with a light *smörgåsbord,* hors d'oeuvres, literally rendered sandwich-table: caviar, anchovy, sardines, shavings of smoked salmon, slices of bologna, and so on. With it the father took a *snaps* of Swedish gin or *brännvin,* and after much pressing Granny consented to take one, too. The main course consisted of *lutfisk:* dried and salted codfish that had been soaked in water for twenty-four hours to take out the salt and then boiled until it was tender as cranberry jelly. It was served with boiled potatoes and a gravy made of cream and chopped hard-boiled eggs. It was followed by *risgrynsgröt:* rice cooked in milk and served with a cover of sugar and cinnamon. Wherever Swedes go,

they must have those two dishes on Christmas Eve. They have had them since the days when Christmas was a pagan celebration of the winter solstice, when dried codfish was the staple winter food, and when rice was the rarest of imported delicacies.

Keith did not become interested until the rice appeared and the father declared that no one could taste it until he or she had "rhymed over the rice." Lena had to begin, and blushingly she read:

"To cook rice is a great feat, especially to get it sweet."

Whereupon everybody applauded, and the mother followed:

"Those who don't like rice are worse than little mice."

The father made them all laugh by saying:

"The rice is sweet and looks very neat, but now I want to eat."

The cutting of the cake, with its coating of sugar and its many layers of custard . . . the wine, port and sherry, poured from tall glass decanters with silver labels hung about their necks to show which was which . . . the blushing native apples and the figs from distant sunlit shores . . . the almonds and raisins that tasted best when eaten together . . . the candy and the caramels . . . the absence of restraint and reproof . . . the freedom to indulge one's utmost appetite . . . the smiles and the pleasant words and the jokes sprung by the father . . . and in the midst of it all a pause laden with rose-coloured melancholy. . . .

"Why can it not be Christmas every day," asked Keith suddenly.

"Because Christmas then would be like any other day," the father replied, reaching for the first parcel which was always for Keith.

One by one they were handed out. Each one was elaborately addressed and furnished with a rhymed or unrhymed tag that often hid a sting beneath its clownish exterior. The father read the inscription aloud before he handed each parcel to its recipient, who had to open it and let its contents be admired by all before another gift was distributed.

The table became crowded. The floor was a litter of paper. Lena giggled. Granny's cap was down on one ear. Keith could not sit still on his chair.

"To Master Keith Wellander," the father read out. "A friendly warning, to be remembered in the morning and all through the day. He who slops at meals is a pig that squeals and hurts his parents alway."

Keith took the parcel with less than usual zest. It was rectangular and very heavy. For a moment he hesitated to open it. There was something about its inscription that puzzled and bothered him.

At last the wrapper came off, and he gazed uncomprehendingly at a large piece of wood hollowed out like a canoe.

"A boat . . ." he stammered.

"A trough," rejoined his father, a strange, almost embarrassed look appearing on his face. "This is Christmas and I want you to be happy, but you must learn to eat decently, and I thought this might serve you as a lesson and a reminder."

Keith said nothing. He sat looking at that piece of wood as if it were a dragon that had swallowed the

whole Christmas in a single gulp. He wanted to cry, but for the first time he seemed to feel a pride that forbade him to do so. . . .

"Master Keith Wellander," the father read out again with evident haste and in a voice which he tried to make very jolly. "When beaten in the open field, this will be my trusty shield."

It was *the* package—and the trough was forgotten.

The boy trembled with excitement. His hands tore vainly at the paper cover, which, in the end, had to be removed by the father.

On the table, fully revealed at last, stood a real fortress of cardboard, with a drawbridge that could be raised, and a tower in the centre, and at the top of it a flagstaff flying the Swedish colours.

It was his heart's most cherished desire, the thing that had seemed so unattainable that he had deemed it useless to whisper it into his mother's ear.

For a long while he did not move at all, but just looked and looked, seemingly afraid to touch the new toy. Then a warm flood of joy shot through him, and suddenly he was seized by an irresistible impulse to kiss his father—which was a most unusual endearment between them. As he put his hand on the table to get off the chair, it touched the trough, and once more his mood changed. He seemed to stiffen, and all he could do was to hold out his hand and whisper:

"Thank you very much, papa!"

IV

ON Christmas Day morning everybody rose while it was still pitch dark outside. After a hasty cup of coffee, the parents and Keith set off for Great Church to attend *julotta*—yule matins—an early service held only that one day of the year.

More snow had fallen, and now it was freezing, so that every step they took produced a peculiar, almost metallic crunching. From every quarter silent crowds in their holiday best streamed toward the old church. They seemed very solemn, but Keith sensed the happy spirit underlying their outward sedateness. It filled him with a wild desire to romp, and it was merely the awe of his father's presence that kept him in check.

The church was packed, but they found good seats. Keith had eyes for one thing only: the Star of Bethlehem that blazed above the screen of darkly green spruces surrounding the altar. All the rest of it was lost on him.

Then the organ music burst forth, and for a moment he cowered as under a blow. It was too much of a novelty, and the vibrations touched his super-sensitive nerves annoyingly. After a while he grew more accustomed to it, but he did not like it, and he said so loudly enough to bring him a stern glance from his father and smiles from some of the people in the pew ahead. During the brief sermon he slept peacefully.

As soon as they were home again, the fortress was brought out and preparations made for a great siege. In the midst of it he left his corner to put a question to the mother, who was dozing over a book in her easy chair.

"How could papa know that I wanted it," he asked, and she knew what he was thinking of.

"Don't you remember," she answered smiling slyly, "how you came home one day last summer and talked about something you had seen in a window on West Long Street, and papa was listening."

"So long ago," mused Keith, "and I didn't know he heard it."

"Oh, yes, he heard, and he remembered. You don't understand papa. He doesn't want you to ask for things because he finds it such a pleasure to figure out what you want and give it to you unexpectedly."

Keith returned to his corner thinking hard, as was his wont at times. The siege was postponed. He took out the trough and studied it carefully. It would make a good boat. Then he put it down and sat for a while looking at the little fortress—so like the one he could see when he looked out of their front windows. His heart swelled, and with a rush that nearly upset his little table, he made for his father in the parlour, crawled up on his lap, put both arms about his neck, and kissed him. And to his surprise he was not repelled. But a moment later his father put him down on the floor and said in a voice that sounded a little choked:

"Go back and play with your soldiers now."

Then came dinner, always the same on Christmas Day: *smörgäsbord;* roasted fresh ham with mashed

potatoes and tiny cubes of Swedish turnips fried in butter; rice and milk; cake and wine.

And the day ended as it had begun, happily and peacefully. Never had the boy felt more warmly toward his father. But at dinner the next day, which was also a holiday so that the father was at home, Keith happened to spill something on the table cloth.

"Remember your Christmas present," said the father sharply. "You are old enough to behave properly at table, and if you won't, we shall let you eat in your own corner and eat out of the trough."

During the rest of that day Keith could not play with his fortress. Once he took the trough to the window that happened to be open and contemplated the possibility of dropping it into the lane. But his courage failed him.

It stayed with him as part of his little stock of toys, and gradually it came to be viewed with a certain amount of indifference. But on the rare occasions when he was permitted to have a playmate at home, he always managed to hide the trough under his mother's bureau. And even the mere consciousness of its presence there would sometimes set his cheeks burning.

V

IT was summer again. The school was closed. Keith's pleas to be allowed to play with Johan became impassioned. Consequently his parents were pleased when Aunt Brita asked if Keith could spend a

few weeks with them in a little cottage they had hired on an island halfway between Stockholm and the open sea.

To Keith this was a tremendous adventure—his first excursion from home, and almost his first acquaintance with real country life. In fact, the impressions of the journey itself were so many and so novel that his mind couldn't retain anything at all. The same thing happened over and over again during the earlier part of his life, so that out of that epoch-making summer visit, for instance, only a single slight incident took up a lasting abode in his memory.

The cottage stood in the middle of the island, which was so small that a fifteen-minute walk took them down to the nearest shore. Thither they went one afternoon not long after his arrival to bathe—his aunt, his cousin Carl who was a year younger than himself, Keith, a couple of other children of the same age, and Mina, an eighteen-year old girl living with Keith's uncle and aunt in a position halfway between ward and servant. Across the fields and along shaded wood paths they ran joyously to a sheltered bay with a sandy beach from which the open fjord could be seen in the distance. The children stripped helter-skelter and went into the shallow water as nature had made them, but Mina, who was to assist them, had for want of bathing suit put on a starched white petticoat. The upper part of her body was bare, showing two beautifully pointed breasts.

Keith looked and looked at those breasts until Mina noticed him and actually began to blush. As if embarrassed, she picked up one of the other children and began to swing it around in a circle. Her movement

turned Keith's attention to the petticoat, and suddenly he could think of nothing else.

The children were naked. Why should Mina wear a piece of clothing that even Keith could see was quite unfitted for such a use. There must be something to hide. What could it be? At last he could contain himself no longer, but blurted out:

"Why does Mina wear that silly skirt?"

"Because she is afraid of catching cold," replied his aunt from the shore with a slight jeer in her voice and one of her shrewd smiles.

"Why shouldn't we catch cold, too," was his next question.

There was no direct answer, but he could hear his aunt mutter between her teeth:

"Drat that boy!"

Then she burst into open laughter, while Mina rushed ashore and hastily began to dress behind a close screen of undergrowth.

After that Mina did not go in bathing with the children.

Many years later Keith could still visualize the whole scene as if it had happened only a few days ago, while all his efforts to recall the cottage where they lived, or anything else seen that summer, were vain.

VI

IN the autumn of that year Keith was sent to a "real" school, selected after much inquiry by his parents as combining a reasonable degree of efficiency and social standing with an equally reasonable cost of tuition. It was private like the first one, kept by two middle-aged spinster sisters, one of whom was tall, angular and firm, while the other was short, fat and sentimental. It held about two scores of pupils, most of whom were girls. These girls ranged in years to the near-marriageable age, while none of the boys was more than eight years old. Thus the atmosphere was distinctly feminine, which in the eyes of Keith's mother marked an added advantage.

The only thing that excited Keith about the new school was that it took him farther from home than he had ever been allowed to wander unattended before, into a hitherto unexplored region of the city known as the South End. It was a poor man's neighbourhood on the whole, but of that Keith knew nothing at the time. The school occupied a few large and sunny rooms in the rear part of a sprawling old stone structure built like a palace around an enormous cobble-stoned courtyard, with a tall arched gateway providing entrance from the street under the front part of the house. For a while it was quite impressive and a little disturbing, but like

everything else it soon became familiar and commonplace.

To get there from his own part of town, Keith had to cross the Sluice—a lock enabling vessels to pass safely from Lake Maelaren to the salt waters of the Bay in spite of the frequently sharp difference of level. At either end of the lock was a draw-bridge in two sections, raised from the centre to let the larger vessels through. The place was full of interesting sights, and Keith loved in particular to press right up against the edge of the raised bridge as some steamer or small sailing vessel glided leisurely in or out of the ever shifting waters of the lock.

At first it never occurred to him that he might walk around by the other bridge when the one right in his way happened to be open, and so he was late at school several times in quick succession. The first time he was warned. The second he was placed in a corner of the room with his face to the wall and kept there for about one quarter of an hour. The third time the elder Miss Ahlberg applied a ruler to the finger-tips of his left hand, which she held in a firm grasp within one of her own.

The physical sensation gave the boy a terrible shock. No one had ever really hurt him before. The spankings administered at home once in a very great while were like thunderstorms, with a great deal of noise and small harm done. This was something else, and more intimidating than the pain was the manifest intention of the teacher to inflict it. Her face was tense and her eyes flashed fire. Worst of all, however, was the shame of it, for the punishment was applied in front of the whole school.

When Keith retired to his own seat sobbing bitterly, he felt that he could never look the other children in the face, and that they probably would shun him as a pariah. The only thing would be to tell his mother that he could not go back to school again. He was still shaking with sobs, when he heard a boy on the chair beside him whisper into his ear:

"Oh, that's nothing. You just wait till she pulls your hair. She pulls it right out by the roots. I'll show you a bare spot on my head during the next pause."

And so he did when the lesson came to an end and they were permitted to play for a few minutes. Other children joined them, and no one seemed to think less of Keith for what had happened to him. It was a revelation to him and opened vistas of considerable interest. But the memory of the physical and mental shock received was more powerful, and after that he took care to reach school in time regardless of what might be the temptations along his path or the effort it might cost him to get there.

In fact, the incident became to some extent determining for his whole career in school. He never voluntarily did anything that might expose him to punishment, and rarely was he able to forget himself to the extent of incurring reproof. He turned out a docile pupil, and on the whole, docility did not come hard to him. In spite of the vitality with which he overflowed, there was a certain timidity attaching to him.

VII

IT would be wrong to conclude that the little school of the Misses Ahlberg was characterized by any reign of terror. As a rule, the atmosphere was peaceful and kindly, and the teaching was rather good. Keith was eager to learn, and learning came easy to him. In those early days, of course, there was no studying to be done at home, but even in later years he never knew what it was to "plug." In fact, he could not do it. Either his interest was aroused, and then he absorbed the matter at hand in the way he breathed, without the least conscious effort; or his interest remained unstirred, in which case no amount of mechanical application would help. Learning by rote offered no escape in the latter case, for his memory operated in the same way as the rest of his mind, sucking up what fitted it as a blotter sucks the ink, and presenting a surface of polished marble to any matter not germane according to its own mysterious standards.

Soon he could read without any effort whatsoever —anything. Reckoning came easy, too, but writing came hard. It seemed so much easier to take in than to give out in any form. Grammar gave him no difficulty, because it dealt with words, and words possessed a magic charm that always held him. Gradually he began to dip into history and geography—wonderful realms into which his imagination plunged headlong.

He took almost as eagerly to the old stories out of the Bible—stories of which he had caught more than a glimpse at home—but the Catechism was like washing in the morning: it had to be done because higher powers so decreed.

Yes, he learned a good deal for a little boy of his age, but he never knew how it happened. The school was never quite real to him. His home was real, and his play at home. So was his daily walk to and from school with its innumerable opportunities for observation in the raw. There were people in the streets, and shops along the road, and many different kinds of vessels in the harbour. There was the guardhouse on the little square halfway to school, kept by a small detachment of soldiers that were relieved every noon and that never belonged to the same regiment two days in succession. Watching them gave him many suggestions for handling his own tin soldiers in a more business-like fashion.

But at school. . . . He was never absentminded or unattentive, for that might have brought the quick clutch of the elder Miss Ahlberg's bony hand into his own super-sensitive crop of hair, and most of what was going on had enough interest in itself to prevent his mind from straying far afield. He knew the names of his fellow pupils. He played with those of his own age, and he had likes and dislikes, as was natural. But through it all he moved as through a mist, seeing only the thing immediately at hand, and losing sight of everything the moment he had passed it. The three years spent in that school seemed to telescope into each other so that soon afterwards he found himself unable to tell if a thing had happened during the first or last of

those years. Nor did the things he remembered have any connection with the school as a rule, and out of all the boys and girls he met there not one remained distinct in his memory as did the figure of Harald from the first school. When he left the school to go home for the day, he was done with it, and nothing followed him but what was stored in his head. And that, too, seemed forgotten at the time, to be re-discovered later with a sense of pleasant surprise.

And all that time things were happening to him at home and elsewhere that, as far as importance went, stood in curious contrast to his quickly forgotten experiences at school—things that burnt themselves into his mind as a part of its permanent contents. . . .

VIII

THERE was not a private bathroom to be found in Stockholm in those days. One washed hands and face and neck whenever compelled to, and some people, like Keith's father, splashed the upper part of their bodies with water every morning regardless of weather and temperature. Once a week every self-respecting person went to a public bath for a thorough steaming and scrubbing.

Keith's mother did like the rest, and generally she took the boy along as he was admitted without extra charge. Then mother and son would get into a tremendous tub full of hot water—so large and so full

that Keith had to sit up in order to keep his head above water. He always enjoyed it very much, and especially he enjoyed feeling his mother's soft body close to his own.

On an occasion of this kind he had already finished his bath and was sitting on a wooden bench beside the tub wrapped in a big sheet. The old woman attendant stood ready with a similar sheet for his mother, who was just stepping out of the tub facing the boy.

She was still young, and her skin, always beautiful, was aglow with the heat of the bath and the friction of the scrubbing.

Keith stared open-eyed at her, unconscious of any particular interest, and yet filled with a vague, slightly disturbing sense of pleasure.

Then his mother caught his glance. Their eyes met. A slight flush spread over her face.

Grabbing the sheet from the old woman, she flung it about herself. As she did so, he heard her say to the attendant:

"That young gentleman will have to bathe with his father hereafter, I guess."

At first he was conscious of a rebuke, and the cause of it left him quite at sea. He would probably have puzzled over it a great deal more than he did, had not his mind become preoccupied with the idea that he would be allowed to accompany his father to the men's part of the establishment. It was an idea that filled him with a sort of shrinking pride.

IX

AMONG the less intimate friends of his mother was a young widow with a little girl about a year younger than Keith. For some reason unknown to the boy, those two came to see his mother several times that Spring. It was the first time in his life Keith met a girl on familiar terms.

Clara was slender and elfish, with a wealth of yellow tresses falling down her back. She was tender and gay, too, and Keith liked to hear her laugh. When they played, she was always ready to fall in with any whim of Keith's.

One afternoon, when the days were growing longer, Clara's mother asked permission to leave her with the Wellanders while she attended to some business in the neighbourhood. Keith's mother was occupied in the kitchen in some manner making her wish to have the door to the living-room closed. Thus the two children were left to play by themselves.

He never could remember how it began, and he could not tell what put the idea in his head. . . .

It was a new game, and she played it as readily as any other he might have proposed. They had crawled so far into his own corner by the window that they were almost hidden behind mamma's bureau.

At first they whispered to each other, eagerly as children do, but only with the eagerness they might have shown if playing hide-and-seek. Then he raised

her little dress, and she didn't seem to mind. He also undid his own dress, and they studied each other's bodies, noting the differences.

The end of it was that they laid down together on the floor. He put his mouth to hers and hugged her just as tightly as he could. When they had been lying in this way for a while, he whispered to her:

"Isn't it nice?"

And she dutifully whispered back: "It is!"

A few minutes later they were playing with his tin soldiers, and soon after Clara's mother returned to take her away.

During their entire play both doors had remained closed. Keith was quite sure of that. He had looked before he started the new game, although he was not aware of trespassing on prohibited territory.

Afterwards he felt rather uneasy. There was a distinct sense of risk attaching to that game, and he wondered whether Clara might tell her mother. At the same time the thought of what he had done filled him with inexplicable satisfaction, as if, in some way, he had put something over on the grown-ups.

As for his own mother—she seemed to be watching him with unusual concern during the next few days, and he could not escape a suspicion that she knew. Closed doors did not seem to prevent grown-up people from knowing what children did.

At the same time he wondered why he and Clara should not be playing as they had done. There was really nothing to it. And the comparisons they had made took no hold of his imagination. The differences revealed he accepted as he accepted anything that had no direct bearing on his own happiness.

As far as he could recall afterwards, he never saw Clara again. Nor did he seem to miss her.

X

SUMMER again.

The incident with Clara was forgotten. Yet Keith had a sense of being watched a little more closely than usual. He was rarely permitted to go out alone after his return from school. And he was scolded if he ever was late in coming home.

There was mystery in the air. The parents talked together a good deal in a way that made Keith understand they were talking about him and did not want to be overheard.

As soon as school closed the secret became revealed. He would be sent into the real country for the summer to board with perfect strangers.

"Any children," was Keith's first question. Yes, a couple of sons in the house, and probably one or two more boys from the city, boarders like Keith.

It seemed the thing had been planning for a long time. The mother said something about the necessity for Keith of going where everything was clean and wholesome—the air, the food, the people. The boy knew that she had been worrying about him for some reason he could not guess.

An advertisement in a newspaper had led his mother on the track of what she wanted. She read it to him—"a religious family with children of their own would

take a few well-behaved boys of good family for the summer months and give them a real home and as good as parental care."

It turned out to be the sexton of a country parish on the northern shore of Lake Maelaren who had devised this means of eking out his probably limited professional income. The ensuing correspondence had proved quite satisfactory. The mother was evidently pleased. It was almost as good as staying with the pastor himself, she said.

Keith knew what a pastor was. He had several times heard one preach from a funny hanging box in Great Church, and he thought of him as a man who was always dressed in black and who was even more serious than the father. But it did not bother him, partly because he realized that, after all, a sexton was not the same as a pastor, and partly because his mind was full of something else. It was not the country, although his previous experience of it, when he was staying with his aunt, had given him a rather favourable impression. No, what occupied him to the exclusion of everything else was the thought that he would be able to play with other children all day long, and that there would be no one to pull him away just as a game was becoming really interesting.

Exciting days of preparation followed. And finally the day of departure dawned.

The greater part of the journey was to be made by boat to the little town of Enköping, where Mr. Swensson, the sexton, would be waiting with a team. The mother could not go along, and so Keith was placed in the hands of some people going the same way, who

promised to look after him and see that he did not fall into wrong hands when the steamer landed.

Keith had to stand in the stern of the boat and wave his handkerchief as long as his mother remained visible. Then he was free, at last, to surrender himself to the novelty of his situation. And as always upon such occasions, when new impressions came crowding in upon him, the record became too blurred for clear remembrance. This was true not only of the trip on the steamer, the arrival at Enköping with its little old-fashioned red houses, the meeting with Mr. Swanson, the drive of thirty miles or more inland, the arrival at the sexton's house not far from a white spired church, and the introduction to a seemingly endless number of new faces, but of the whole long summer. A couple of months sufficed to wipe out of his memory everything but a few comparatively trivial incidents and impressions.

Only one name escaped the general oblivion—that of the sexton himself. Only one view left a lasting image behind—that of a tremendously large boulder, a memento of the glacial period, that rose like a crude monument right in the centre of a tilled field almost, but not quite out of sight of the house. Only one face would come back in recognizable shape when he tried to recall that rather momentous summer—that of a boy a few years older than himself, who was the leader of all the games played around the big rock in the open field.

XI

QUITE a gang of boys gathered daily about the big rock, generally on the farther side of it where they could not be seen from the house. Beyond the rock in that direction was nothing but an open field, and then the woods, rarely disturbed by a visitor. Thus they were really more safe than indoors as no one could approach them without being detected while still far away.

The two sons of the sexton were there, and a couple of boys from the city besides Keith, and three or four sons of neighbouring farmers. They ranged in ages from eight to eleven or twelve. Keith was the baby, but this was never held up against him. He was commonly treated as an equal, which raised his self-confidence tremendously, but it had also a somewhat embarrassing effect when the others seemed to take for granted that he knew as much as they concerning the matters that most occupied their minds—to judge by their talk at least.

The oldest of the lot, and their undisputed leader, was a peasant boy of remarkable ugliness, squint-eyed and snub-nosed, with tufts of yellow hair always falling over his face and several teeth missing. His clothes were in rags and he never wore shoes. He boasted of never washing unless "the old one" stood over him with a stick, and his language was worse than both his manners and his looks. An unbroken stream

of profanity and obscenity poured from his rarely silent mouth, and he heaped withering scorn on any attempt at decent speech.

Keith had now and then picked up questionable words while playing in the lane where he lived. Johan sported some of them in moments of furious rebellion against his mother's "holiness," as he called it. Once or twice Keith had repeated such words at home and suffered for it. Soon he learned to know the type at first hearing, and he disliked this part of the vocabulary even when he could use it without danger to himself. He developed a greater daintiness in words than in anything else, but this summer formed an exception. The force of suggestion brought to bear on him was too overwhelming, and he strove boldly to vie with the rest in foulness of tongue and thought. As soon as he was back in the city, this habit dropped off him as the soap lather is washed off a bather when he dives into the clear waters of a lake. But the game he had learned to play back of the big rock could not be unlearned in the same way.

This game was in itself a revelation to Keith. He was not shocked or startled, because he had no standards in the matter, but at first he experienced a distinct revulsion. This wore off quickly, however, and soon he accepted what he saw as a natural thing. The boy whose face stuck in Keith's mind with such strange persistency set the pace, and everybody seemed to hold him a hero on that account. Even the other city boys surrendered after a brief resistance and tried humbly to emulate the acknowledged leader.

Everything took place openly in the most brazen fashion, as if they had been playing leap-frog or hide-

and-seek. Every one boasted of his own achievements and tried to outdo the rest in unashamed performance. Yet it was not so much a question of companionship in indulgence as of sportsmanlike competition. Pleasure had little to do with it. What they did, and still more what they pretended to have done, was an assertion and a proof of manliness, and so was the language they used among themselves. If they hid from the older people, that was not because they regarded themselves as engaged in any sinful pursuits, but because the grown-ups to them appeared jealous of all childish pleasures, and particularly jealous of the pleasures most treasured by themselves.

Outwardly Keith played the part of an interested but passive observer. When taunted for his timidity, or as being a mere infant, he parried by using a number of nasty words, some of which he did not know the meaning of. When by himself, he soon found that he could play the game as well as the rest, and it increased his sense of self-importance very much, but of this he said nothing to any one. Something within his own nature protested against the flaunting of such an act, though the act itself carried no offence to his childish mind. The inner protest was not strong enough to break into words or to make the companionship of the other boys seem repulsive to him. Nor was it concerned with anything Keith did by himself.

The summer went very fast. Keith was sorry when told that it was time for him to go home. He would come back, of course, but his regrets were only momentary. No sooner was he started than the idea of seeing his mother, Granny, and his tin soldiers again, put everything else out of his mind.

His mother was overjoyed to see him and revelled in his healthy looks. She made him tell her at great length, over and over again, about everything he had seen and done, about the place and the people, about the food and the games he had played. Keith talked and talked, eagerly and freely, but of the game played behind the big rock he never said a word.

He was then not quite seven years old.

XII

THAT autumn and winter he was permitted to play a good deal with Johan, and always in Johan's home. His mother had a bad spell of depression, and while it made her fret and worry more than ever about Keith, as well as about everything else, she was either too weak to resist his pleas, or she felt his absence as a relief.

To his intense surprise, Keith found that Johan already knew all about the new game, and that he was quite willing to play it. And for a couple of years it became an important part of what they had in common. Chances were not lacking, for Johan's mother was too wrapt up in her postils and religious speculations to watch them closely, and there was always the outhouse to which they could retire for privacy.

Their relationship was a peculiar one. Although the younger by a few months and the smaller by several inches, Keith was the leader and the aggressor. Johan remained passive—too passive, Keith often thought.

There was nothing of love in Keith's feelings toward Johan, nothing emotional. The tenderness that was such a marked feature of his character did not come into play at all. In fact, he rather looked down on Johan, who frequently annoyed him by his dullness and his lack of personal neatness. The truth of it was that he played with Johan merely because he was the only other boy in sight, and in so far as that particular game was concerned, Johan was simply an accessory to it in the same way as his tin soldiers and his toy fort.

In playing it, Keith had always a sense of seeking something else, but he had not the slightest idea of what this something might be. It must have some relation to girls, he felt vaguely, but beyond that vague feeling he could not get. Clara remained forgotten.

Gradually Johan became more and more indifferent and reluctant as far as that game was concerned. Dull as he was, he seemed to have some sort of scruples that Keith couldn't understand. More and more Keith was thrown back on himself. Once more a new set of interests began to take the lion's share of his attention, although the game learned behind the big rock would reassert its puzzling fascination from time to time.

XIII

HIS eagerness to read and his lack of reading matter had for some time presented a growing problem. The books of his father—and there were quite a number of them—were taboo for a

double reason: first, because they were not held safe for him to read, and, secondly, because his father regarded them as his particularly private property that must not be touched by any one else.

So he fell back on the old Bible and chance pickings. The stirring and bloodcurdling stories in the Books of the Maccabees were his favourites. He read them over and over, and he tried to dramatize that unbroken record of battles with the help of his tin soldiers. But the reason he could return to those stories so often was that he began studying them while reading was still a partly mastered art, and half the time he was more interested in the game of reading, so to speak, than in what he read.

A year in the new school had made a great change. He read anything with ease, and while he read rather slowly without ever skipping, his mind took in what he read quickly and thoroughly so that going back over a thing once perused became less and less attractive. He wanted new material for his mind, and he wanted it in steadily increasing quantities.

One day he made a great discovery. Books could be borrowed from other people. One of his schoolmates came to school with a wonderful illustrated copy of "Don Quixote" arranged for children. Keith went into ecstasies over it. The mail-clad figure of the Knight of the Rueful Countenance on the front cover was to him the beckoning guardian of a world of wonders, the very existence of which he had never before suspected. Tears came into his eyes at last as he stared hopelessly at the object of his newly born desire. As a rule he blurted out any wish he might have, but the thing was clearly too precious to ask as a gift or acquire

by bartering, and he had never heard of any other way of getting it.

"Mercy," cried the other boy after having watched him for a while. "You can take it home and read it, if you only promise to bring it back."

For a moment Keith was too overcome to speak. Then he became hysterical with joy. The rest of the school day passed in a trance. He ran a good part of the way home. Arrived there, he almost forgot to give his mother and Granny the inevitable kiss of greeting. And he might even have refused to be bothered by such a thing but for his fear of being put under some discipline that might prevent him from plunging straightway into the unexplored country of make-believe.

On seeing the book, his mother hesitated for a moment, but soon she was delighted with the results it produced. Keith had no thought of asking leave to see Johan that day. He was lost to the world around him. Not a sound was heard from him. There was no nervous running about in futile search for "something to do." The home was as quiet as if he had been away, and yet there he was, safely ensconced in his own corner, where his mother could watch him all the time.

Everybody was happy until the father returned home and heard of what had happened. Having looked the book over for a moment, while the boy watched him with a shrinking heart, he said at last:

"You must return it tomorrow, and I don't want you to borrow any more books. You may spoil it in some way, and then you will have to pay for it, and where are you to get the money?"

Keith tried hard not to cry, but the blow was too

overwhelming. He was driven out of his new paradise after a tantalizing glimpse at it. And he could not understand why. So his tears must needs flow freely, and his throat contracted convulsively with half-choked sobs, and the final result of it was that he was ordered to bed at once. That ended his last chance of abstracting a few more thrills from the borrowed treasure.

Of course, the book was returned the next day. Keith had not yet arrived at the point where the evasion of a parental decree seemed conceivable. And to the sorrow of missing the promised enjoyment was added the humiliation of confessing what had happened at home. To lie about it was another thing that never occurred to him, and to act without explanation was quite foreign to his nature.

A few sad days followed. Then his life resumed its customary tone, and it was as if the lank, but to him far from ludicrous, shape of Don Quixote had never crossed his horizon. And soon after Christmas recurred once more.

Among the many packages falling to his share, there were two of a shape that suggested the possibility of more tin soldiers. But when he held them in his hand, they failed to yield to pressure as would a cardboard box. Curiosity turned into genuine suspense. And when at last two books lay in front of him as his own, with the implied permission that he could read them to his heart's content whenever he chose, a pang of something like real love for his father shot through his heart.

Those two little volumes became at once his most priceless possession and the foundation of his first li-

brary. To others they might appear quite commonplace books, without much value from any point of view. To him they were passports to a realm of action and freedom and colour, where he could roam at will in search of everything he missed in real life. One was bound in white with the picture of an African lion hunt on the front cover. The other one had a plain brown binding. Both had coloured illustrations and contained stories of hunting and travelling adventures in all sorts of out-of-the-way places. There were tales of lion hunting with Arabs and tiger hunting in the jungles of India, of whaling in the Arctic and hairbreadth escapes from giant snakes in South America, of cruises in southern seas and caravaning across the high plateaus of Central Asia.

One story in particular stuck in his mind, and more particularly one little detail out of that story. It was one of comparative repose and few sensational incidents, relating the perfectly peaceful, but nevertheless strange and interesting experiences of a European traveller through some desert region back of the Caspian Sea. Arriving at a nomad camp far away from all civilization, this traveller was met with touching hospitality. During a formal visit to the chieftain of the tribe, he was offered tea. With the tea was handed him a bowl containing a single lump of sugar. In European fashion he picked up this and dropped it into his cup. Not a word was said, but something told him that he had committed some dreadful mistake. By and by, as he watched the others, he understood. Sugar was so rare that to use it in ordinary fashion was out of question, and so the solitary lump served was meant to be licked in turn by each, and he, as the guest

of honour, had been given the first chance. To Keith's mind that story seemed as clearly realized as if he had played a part in it himself. And what occupied him more than anything else was the pitiful existence of those poor nomads to whom even such a common thing as sugar was an almost unattainable luxury. It was his first lesson in human sympathy, and it was typical of his own existence and bent that it should have come out of a book.

XIV

FROM that day one of his main objects in life was to acquire books. He had little pride as a rule, in spite of all his sensitiveness, and when books were concerned he had none at all. Having discovered that a friend of the family, who until then had been regarded with supreme indifference, held some sort of clerical position in a publishing house, his devotion to Uncle Lander suddenly became effusive and he begged so shamelessly and so successfully that at last his father had to intercede. Out of a half-hour sermon on things that must not be done, Keith grasped only that, as usual, he could not do what he wanted. Money was still a mystery to him, and he never suspected that Uncle Lander would have to pay his employers for every book taken out of the stock.

The sole check to his passion sprang logically from the very fervor of that passion: a book being such a precious object to himself, he could not dream of tak-

ing it away from somebody else. As in a flash the true spirit of his father's objection to borrowed books was revealed to him. That objection became his own and stuck to him through life: if he liked a borrowed book, the inescapable duty of returning it was too painful to be faced, and if he didn't like it, there was no reason for borrowing it. Books became sacred things to him, to be cherished and protected as nothing else. The loss of one was a catastrophe.

Soon he had a small library of his own, kept on a shelf in the huge wardrobe that stood in the vestibule leading to the parlour. Made up at first of odds and ends bearing no real relation to his desire for reading matter, it gradually acquired a certain homogeneity reflecting the boy's state of mind. Books of travel and adventure continued to prevail for a long while. Equally favoured were stories dealing with Norse mythology and the heroic legends of his race. The grim record of the Niebelungs was familiar to him at the age of eight, and the first heroes of his worship were young Siegfried of divine aspect and Dietrich of Bern, who seemed to the boy the final embodiment of worldly wisdom. To these should be added Garibaldi, of whose South American campaigns, so touchingly shared by the faithful Anita, he read graphic accounts in an odd volume of an illustrated weekly. The word liberty first came to him from the lips of the picturesque Italian, while Anita and the women of the old Germanic sagas struck him by their contrast to his mother.

In the main, all his reading made for escape and compensation. He read to get away from his own surroundings, and he revelled in characters of fiction and

legend and history that possessed qualities lacking in himself. By nature he was a queer mixture of rashness and timidity, but through his mother's anxiety on his behalf the latter quality was constantly being nursed at the expense of all tendency to action. And so, in order to keep the balance, he revelled in the imaginary or real deeds of men whose very life-breath was danger. The more the books gave him of what he craved, the less he thought of looking for it in life.

Consequently his new passion seemed a godsend to his mother, who encouraged him in every possible way. It brought a solution of many difficulties and worries by keeping him at home and quiet. The only resistance came, as usual, from the father, who repeatedly counselled moderation and often made the boy drop his book and turn to something else—which seemed to Keith the worst of all the tyrannies to which he found himself exposed. But most of the time the father was powerless because of his absence from home, and soon Keith learned that his reading formed the only exception to his mother's general refusal to permit any circumvention of his father's explicit command.

It also became plain to Keith that the mother favoured his love for the books not only as a means of relief to herself. Evidently she held it admirable in itself and a promise bearing in some mysterious manner on his future. His mother's approval flattered him, but otherwise her attitude was a riddle which he did not care to solve as long as it brought him permission to explore at will this newly discovered world of perfectly safe enjoyment. In the end, however, that strange reverence shown by his mother combined with his own increasing ability to live the cherished life of

his dreams at second hand into an influence that more or less warped his entire outlook on life. It robbed him to some extent of his sense of proportion.

XV

HIS father noticed his timidity and seemed to view it with a sense of humiliation. Once, in the presence of company, he threatened to put him into skirts "like any other girl." Keith had played too little with other children to have acquired the usual male consciousness of superiority, but his father's words cut him to the quick nevertheless, because he knew them to be meant for an insult. He resolved then and there to show his mettle in some striking way, and promptly be began to dream of such ways, but chance being utterly lacking for even a normal display of boyish daring, it merely served to plunge him more deeply into the sham life of his books.

Yet he was not without courage, and it was not physical pain, or the fear of it, that brought the tears so quickly into flowing. Once, when returning home with an uncovered bowl full of molasses from the grocery, he stumbled at the foot of the stairs and fell so that his forehead struck the edge of the lowest step and his scalp was cut open to the width of nearly an inch. The blood blinded him so that he could barely make his way upstairs. When he reached the kitchen at last, his mother was scared almost out of her wits, and her fright was augmented by the manner in which he

sobbed as if his heart were breaking. When at last the flow of blood was partly stenched and his crying still continued, his mother tried to tell him that there was no cause to be scared.

"I am not scared," he sputtered to her surprise. "I didn't know I was hurt, but . . . but . . . I spilled all the molasses."

That night his father gave him a shining new silver coin without telling him why, and the boy couldn't guess it at the time, though later he learned the reason from his mother.

A favourite method employed by the father to test and to develop his courage was to send him alone after dark on some errand into the cellar or up into the attic, and the boy went without protest, no matter how much he might dread the task at heart. Even the servant girls felt reluctant about visiting the cellar at night, and the occasional discovery of a drunken man asleep in front of the cellar door made the danger far from imaginary.

Going down to the cellar, Keith was permitted to bring a candle along, but the danger of fire made this out of the question when the attic was his goal. One night on his way up there, he discovered a white, fluttering shape by the square opening in the outer wall. He stopped on the spot, and his heart almost stopped, too—but only for a moment. Driven by some necessity he could not explain to himself, he picked himself together and pushed on, only to find that the intimidating spectre consisted of some white clothing hung for drying on the iron rod of the shutter and kept moving by a high wind. It was a lesson that went right home and stuck.

During that one moment of hesitation, the idea of a ghost tried to take form in his more or less paralysed consciousness. He had read of ghosts, and overheard stories told by the servant girls in apparent good faith, and that whitish, almost luminous thing in front of him, stirring restlessly with a faint hissing sound, looked and acted the part of a ghost to perfection. But the idea was rejected before it had taken clear shape and without any reasoning, instinctively, automatically. His father always became scornful at the mere mention of ghosts, and that settled it.

When it was all over, and he was safe within the kitchen door once more, he told no one what had happened. He thought that, in spite of his initial scare, he had acted decidedly well, and he was eager for approval, but he was kept from telling by an uneasy feeling that his father would laugh at him if he did.

XVI

THE boy's timidity took quite different forms. One day the whole family was astir. His parents had in some way obtained tickets to that evening's performance at the Royal Opera. As the custom of the place was to permit the holders of two adjoining seats to bring in a child with them, it was decided after much discussion that Keith might go along. His mother tried to explain the nature and purpose of a theatrical performance, but what she said made no impression on the boy, who was more ex-

cited by the thought of accompanying his parents than by what he might hear or see.

Their seats were in a box in the third tier. It was like being suspended halfway between the top and the bottom of a gigantic well. The depth of that well affected the boy unpleasantly, while the strong light and the hum of talk confused him. He clung closely to his mother with averted face. Suddenly the light went out, and he heard his mother whisper:

"Look now!"

Glancing up, he found that a new room full of people had appeared where before was nothing but a flat wall.

"What became of the wall, mamma," he asked aloud. She hushed him with a smile, and he heard some one in another box titter.

"Now keep very quiet and try to follow what happens on the stage," his mother admonished in another whisper.

They were giving Auber's "Crown Diamonds." The rich dresses appealed somewhat to him, but not strongly. The music made no impression on him whatsoever. The general effect on his mind was one of bewilderment, that soon lapsed into bored indifference. Then he discovered that most of the men on the stage were armed, and that some of them acted as if they might put their weapons into use at any moment. And he, the ardent participant in all the bloody deeds of Siegfried and Dietrich and Kriemhild, he, the passionate hunter of big game on five continents, became so nervous that nothing but fear of his father kept him from burying his head in his mother's lap in order not to see any more. When, at last, a shot rang out on the stage, even that fear could no longer restrain him

and there was nothing for his mother to do but to escort him out of the box into the corridor. There, under the care of a friendly doorkeeper who treated him to candy out of a paper bag, he stayed in perfect contentment until his parents were ready to go home.

"Oh, we must go again, Carl," he heard his mother cry in a tone of high exultation.

"All right, you go," said the father with a yawn. "Keith and I don't care—do we, Keith?"

"No," Keith replied mechanically, but even as he spoke he became conscious of a desire to share his mother's enthusiasm rather than his father's indifference. If they would only promise not to shoot! . . .

XVII

THREE years he remained in the school of the Misses Ahlberg. Three times fall and winter and spring were followed by that painfully delicious period of almost unbroken daylight, when the very books seemed to lose some of their magic, when even the air of the old lane became fraught with some mystic urge, and when life within stone walls turned into an unbearable burden.

He rose by degrees from mere spelling to the study of a foreign language, German. He learned his Catechism by heart—or rather by rote, for the time-worn phrases dropped from his lips at demand very much as water runs down a mill sluice, without leaving any trace. In fact, little of what he learned appeared to

touch his real life at all. Nor could he be made to take it very seriously, although, on the whole, he was counted a good pupil.

He used schoolbooks, of course, but he was rarely caught reading one of them. His mind seemed to master the offered knowledge by some mysterious process of absorption of which he himself was never aware. Study in the sense of close and painful application was quite foreign to him. Yet he seemed capable of mastering anything that aroused his interest—or that stirred his vanity, for he loved to shine. Unfortunately most of his schoolmates were dull plodders who had not yet reached a stage where plodding counted, and so his triumphs came easy and there was nothing to spur him into serious effort.

At the end of the third year he had practically exhausted the possibilities of the little school in the South End, and it was understood that he would not return in the fall, when he would be nine years old. But nothing had been decided about what he was to do instead.

He had not been unhappy with the Misses Ahlberg and his leave-taking lacked none of the expected emotional colouring. Yet he left without a pang, without regrets. It was as if he had passed through that school in his sleep, waking up only when he reached home and his books. He had made no friends and formed no ties at school, and outside of it he had never associated with any of his schoolmates. No one of them left a mark on his memory as Harald had done. In a place full of girls, his little heart never was betrayed into a single quickened beat of anticipation. Nor did he make any new connection

outside of the school during those years. One might almost say that he had ceased to realize the existence of things or persons except in so far as they administered to some immediate need within himself.

Summer came early that year, and with it came a marked change. His restlessness grew almost morbid, so that his mother found it nearly impossible to keep him indoors. He was every minute pleading for leave to play with Johan, and on several occasions when permission had been granted, he and Johan left the quiet lane to play with strange boys on the Quay. It drove his mother almost to despair, and she tried one thing after another to keep him at home.

She was doing some embroidery at that particular time, and the work seemed to interest the boy a great deal. Sometimes, when he had given up all hope of getting out, he could stand for many minutes at a time watching the needle with its tail of brightly coloured yarn pass in and out through the wide meshes of the fabric. Finally his mother suggested that he try his hand at it, and he grabbed eagerly at that chance of diversion. For about three days he was as devoted to his needle as any girl. By that time he had filled a small square with a sort of design of his own, and when his father returned home in the evening of the third day, Keith displayed his achievement with considerable pride.

"Fine," remarked the father dryly. "Now we know what to do with him if Uncle Granstedt does not think him good enough for a carpenter. We'll apprentice him to a tailor. He'll make a good one, I am sure, and as it takes nine tailors to make a man, he need not have as much courage as a woman even."

That disposed of the embroidery once for all, but it seemed also to bring matters to a head. As soon as the father was done with his meal, the mother made him accompany her into the parlour, and there they stayed an endless time. When they returned to the living-room, Keith could see that his mother had been crying, but she was smiling brightly at that moment, and her voice had a ring of triumph when she said:

"Papa has something to tell you, Keith."

"Yes," the father drawled. "Your mother, as usual, has persuaded me to do what I doubt is right. Because she has pleaded for you, I'll let you enter the public school in the fall. That will cost money, and I am not sure it is good for a poor man's son like you, but we'll see. It means that you will have to do some studying at last, for if you don't—well, then you'll have to learn a trade."

As always on such occasions, Keith took his cue from the mother, and her mien told him that he ought to be pleased. It was a new departure anyhow, and it implied evidently an advance that would administer to his rather undernourished sense of self-importance. For anything doing so he had a passionate craving, and so he was ready to rejoice.

The new school was still far off, however, and in the meantime there was close at hand a problem that piqued him annoyingly. Had his father really meant to make a carpenter or a tailor of him if his mother had not interceded, or was the talk about it merely an expression of the father's peculiar unwillingness to admit any sort of tender feeling toward the son?

That was not the way Keith put it, in so far as he attempted any formulation at all, but it was in sub-

stance what his momentary speculations amounted to, and the solution of the problem lay quite beyond him. He never could make out just what his father meant or thought or felt in regard to himself.

XVIII

THEN several developments followed each other in quick succession. First of all his father bought him a season ticket at the public open-air baths in the North River and made him join a class of small boys for instruction in the manly art of swimming. The world was opening up, Keith felt, and his father was lured to the verge of openly expressed satisfaction at finding that the boy's timidity did not extend to cold water.

No sooner, however, had he mastered the mechanics of the thing sufficiently to graduate from the boardwalk onto a cork pillow in the water, than he had to quit because the whole family was "going into the country" for the summer. To Keith this meant a chance of playing with other children without having to ask permission every time and rarely getting it. To his mother it meant a distinct social advance, as no family staying in town all summer could be held really respectable.

The "country" was located on one of the numerous islands forming the outskirts of the city and could be reached by the father after he finished work by a fif-

teen-minute ride on one of the innumerable little steamboats running back and forth like so many busy shuttles across every sheet of water in the vicinity of Stockholm. Even then it was a suburb, but the houses were called villas, and there were plenty of trees between the buildings, and the roads meandering whimsically among miniature lawns and gardens had no pavements, and the lake came right up to the door.

There the father had rented a single room from some acquaintances who made their home on the island all the year round. The man was a German who had recently returned to Sweden after serving as a non-commissioned officer in the Franco-Prussian war—a stocky Bavarian with a tremendous black beard, a fondness for top-boots and long-stemmed pipes, and a startling tendency to shout every communication in the form of a command. He was a good-natured soul nevertheless, in spite of his appearance, his occasional bursts of temper, and his exaggerated regard for discipline, and he was full of stories about real fighting that differed puzzlingly from what Keith had read about such matters. Uncle Laube had a pet phrase that stuck in the boy's mind and exercised a corroding influence on some of his most cherished sentiments:

"A man must be able to fight, but it is black hell when he has to."

There were three children in the family—a boy two or three years older than Keith, a girl of his own age and a baby sister. The boy was named Adolph and the elder girl Marie. All three of them, but especially the boy, were being brought up in strict Teutonic fashion, which made a sort of super-religion out of obedience. At the mere sound of his father's voice,

Adolph trembled and stiffened up like a recruit under training. Once the two boys and Marie strayed beyond bounds to a place where some timber rafts were tied up along the shore. Adolph led the way onto the rafts, and the two others followed. It was great fun jumping from log to log where two rafts met, until Marie suddenly slipped into the water and began to sink like a stone. Quick as a flash Adolph dropped on his knees on a log that was partly under water, grabbed the girl by her hair and pulled her out. On their return home, Adolph was licked until he could not stand on his feet for leading the smaller children into mischief. Then he got a crown for the pluck shown in saving his sister's life.

This even balancing of justice made a deep impression on Keith. He thought and thought of it, and his reason, which already was very active, appreciated the logic of such a dispensation, but his heart rebelled strangely and turned for a while to his own father as a paragon of mildness, while the black-bearded Uncle Laube became an object of repulsion bordering on hatred. Fortunately the disciplinarian was away most of the day and Keith was running wild around the island. This was not possible without some protests from his mother, who regarded all water outside of a tub with deep distrust. He nevertheless maintained an unusual degree of independence until one day, while playing in one of the rowboats lying outside a small pier near their house, he, too, fell in and was pulled out by Adolph.

The children were alone at the time. Keith had no consciousness of having been in danger, but he was in a funk because of his wet clothing. Instead of going

home at once, he ran to an open spot at the other end of the island and played in the sun to get dry. After a while his mother appeared, disturbed by his long absence. There was nothing to do but to respond to her call, although he did so most reluctantly, his clothing still being damp. His slow movements aroused her suspicion, and in another moment the awful truth was out.

"You might have drowned," his mother cried, too frightened to scold. "Or you might have caught cold and died of that. Perhaps . . . you had better come home at once."

"No," protested Keith. "Adolph was there, and it hasn't been cold at all."

"But think, Keith," his mother remonstrated, her eyes dim with tears, "you wouldn't care to die and leave me?"

"I don't want to leave you," the boy said, "and I was not going to."

She took his head between her two hands and looked long into his eyes before she asked at last:

"Are you not scared of death?"

"I don't know," he stammered, wincing slightly under her stare. He could not grasp what she was driving at. Death carried no clear meaning to him. It had never touched his real inner life, and he never thought of it. No matter how frightened he became, it never occurred to him that he might cease to exist. Even his dreams had no colouring of that kind.

In spite of his mother's anxiety, he learned to swim that summer. He liked it and did it rather well for his age. But he never ventured very far out. Rebel as he might against the check on his movements, his

mother's attitude had left a lasting mark on him, and avoiding needless risks seemed a natural thing to him. As a result of this inhibition, all his outdoor playing lacked that complete abandon which is the soul of it. He had been made an indoor child beyond retrieve.

XIX

BEING so much in the open air and moving about as a child should, his nights during that summer passed mostly without dreams of any kind, and also without other disturbances worth speaking of. He was too healthily tired for anything but sleep.

The winter nights, following days spent largely indoors with little company and less exercise, were quite different. Then the passing from wakefulness to sleep took him through a dangerous twilight period, when games of the kind learned behind the big rock seemed not only natural, but the most enticing thing in the world. And the more he was thrown back on his own resources, the more tempting those games became. They represented, besides, something that was entirely his own, with which no one else could interfere. It was a secret that would have been the sweeter for being shared with some one else, he felt, but Johan's peculiar attitude in this matter had filled him with a shyness not his own by nature.

Then, with the sleep, came also the dreams. At first they were, or seemed to be, mere plays of fancy—shadowy repetitions of daylight experiences in clownish

distortion. Then they began to change. An element of unrest, and finally of dread, began to fill them. This did not happen, however, until the same elements had found a place in his waking life, and particularly not until the hours of that twilight period had developed into a source of increasingly acute conflict.

Nothing palpable had happened. Nothing had been said openly to convince him that his secret was known and that it was evil. Yet the air about him seemed full of suspicion and suspense and menace. The mere way in which his mother looked at him at times filled his soul with sinister misgivings. And she was always talking about temptations and dangers that walk in the dark. Or else she dropped mysterious warnings about the duty of keeping one's soul and body clean and pure.

It was all very disturbing, and he should have liked to ask questions, but always some imperious force within himself kept him back. He felt that his sweet secret would never bear open discussion, but the more desperately he clung to it, the more his mind was poisoned with doubts out of which soon grew fears.

Thus began the new dream life.

He was as a rule the only living being in those dreams. Everything else consisted of lifeless things, and mostly of spaces and dimensions rather than of objects. The dominant characteristic was an increase of size proportional to the increase of distance from himself. He found himself, for instance, in the midst of a vast space laid out in squares. Where he stood at the centre, those squares were just large enough to hold him. Then, as his glance passed outward, the squares became larger and larger, until at last their dimensions became gigantic. Soon they began to move toward

him, growing smaller as they approached, and yet filling his soul with a horror based entirely on the monstrous size of those squares that were still miles away. Or he walked down a corridor built of stones that, as it opened out in front of him, expanded indefinitely until it assumed proportions that filled him with a sickening sense of his own smallness. As he moved forward, the corridor automatically contracted, but always the horror of those immeasurable vastnesses still ahead of him continued dominant and inevitable. At other times sums of figures came moving toward him from every direction, and the farther away from him they were, the more enormous they grew, until his mind no longer could take them in, and his heart quaked at the thought that sooner or later one of them would reach him in its original awe-inspiring immensity.

He tried once to tell his mother about those dreams, but found it impossible to express what he wished to describe. Not long afterwards he was aroused in the middle of the night by his mother calling him by name. Her voice betrayed worry.

"What's the matter, Keith," she asked when at last he woke up sufficiently to answer her call. "Were you dreaming?"

"I don't know," replied the boy, and at that moment he didn't know.

"I thought first you were crying," explained the mother, "and then I heard that you were counting something."

"He was probably repeating his multiplication table," muttered the father. "I wish he would learn his lessons in the daytime, so that we could sleep in peace at night."

The next morning Keith had forgotten all about it but his mother reminded him of what had happened during the night in order to find out whether he had any bad dreams. Keith shook his head. Then a thought flashed through his mind.

"Do I often talk in my sleep," he asked.

"Hardly ever," said his mother. "But the other night you read the Lord's Prayer from beginning to end, and I wish you would read it as nicely when you are saying your prayers before going to sleep."

"He is studying too much," Granny put in from the kitchen. "His nose is always buried in a book. That's the whole trouble, I tell you."

"No, mamma, I don't think reading does him any harm," said Keith's mother, and for some reason Keith felt relieved by the diversion.

XX

EVEN Keith could not escape a feeling about this time of having arrived at some sort of station or landmark on his road through life. He was frightfully self-centred. He seemed to be thinking about nothing but himself. In reality, however, he was not reflecting at all on the character and probable course of his life. It was all a matter of feeling and what concerned him was merely the comforts or discomforts, pleasures or pains, exhilarations or boredoms of the passing moment. The future was

a word that, at the most, implied things that might happen a few days after tomorrow. The convinced visioning of events a year or more distant was still utterly beyond him. And the past seemed to vanish with the setting sun of the day just ended.

Yet he was dimly aware of facing a transition that, somehow, must make a great change in his entire life. Something that he could not define was drawing to an end, and something else, equally indefinable, was about to begin. The "school for small children" which he had left, and the "school for boys" into which he would soon enter, were the symbols used by his mind to express the passing out of one phase of life into another, but as such they suggested the actual change without revealing it. And there were moments when Keith's vague efforts to look ahead were accompanied by a sense of crushing dread, while at other times they might fill him with a never before tasted fervor of existence.

He was near the completion of his ninth year. It seemed quite an age, but this appearance was contradicted by troublesome facts. He was very small for his age and hopelessly tied to the apron strings of his mother in spite of all his father's efforts to pry him loose. The reason for this failure was that his father lacked the time or the capacity for winning the boy's whole-hearted attention and affection.

The one thing the father seemed to care for on his return home was to be left alone with his own preoccupations, and these did not include the boy. He could not unbend. He could not subordinate his own momentary desire or disinclination to an interest essentially foreign to his own self. In other words, he was

just as self-centred as Keith, and just as unreflecting on the whole. Both lived completely in the present, and both wished to escape from it. The only difference between them was that while Keith sought his escape in space, so to speak, by means of his books, the father's only road of escape led him into a past of which the boy formed no part.

Either through some fault of his own nature, or through the restrictive policy of his parents, Keith at nine had formed no real attachments outside of his immediate surroundings, and no life of his own that was not enclosed by the walls of his childhood home. This state of affairs tended always to throw him back on the mother as his most satisfactory source of inspiration and the magnetic pole of his emotional compass. And she on her part left no effort untried that could help to fasten his affections more closely to her.

Unconsciously but increasingly she worked to cut the boy off from all the rest of the world in order that she might have him the more exclusively to herself. She expressed openly the wish that he might be a girl, because girls in those days were so much less likely to escape the parental protection.

The boy was pleased by her attempts at monopolization. There was something flattering and softly reassuring about her passionate pleas for the uppermost place in his heart. And yet he rebelled with increasing violence against the closeness of her clutch on him. He seemed to choke at times, and a blind hatred rose within him without ever revealing itself as in any way related to his mother. One of the dominant emotions of this and the following period of his life was one of intense impatience that seemed to be directed toward

no particular object. Once in a great while he turned toward his father with an expectation of relief, but this expectation was always foiled, and so he was plunged back again and again into an inner life of his own that fed almost exclusively on books and had little or nothing in common with the reality to which the new school was supposed to form a gateway.

PART III

I

THE new school was located in another part of the South End, separated only by the churchyard from the old church of St. Mary Magdalene. It was a state institution demanding an entrance fee, which, although quite reasonable, yet sufficed to keep out the children of mere wage earners. It was a school for the offspring of the "better classes" and good enough for all but the most select who must needs turn to certain private institutions of still greater exclusiveness for instruction.

Its official title was St. Mary's Elementary School and it had only five grades or classes, as they were called, being supplemented by a "gymnasium," from which the pupils passed on to the university. No boy was admitted under nine, but there seemed to be no limit at the other end, for at the time of Keith's entrance the upper grades still held a few youngsters with well developed moustaches who, from the viewpoint of Keith's own peach-skinned diminutiveness, looked like veritable patriarchs. Stories were afloat about their actually being addressed as "mister" by the teachers.

Admission was conditioned by examinations held in the school itself, and thither Keith was escorted by his mother one late August day. All novelties stimulated him, and to his inexperience the rather dingy old school seemed enormously impressive. The mere fact that it occupied a whole building all by itself was enough.

In addition, however, it had an assembly hall large enough to hold several hundred boys, and there were numerous rooms capable of holding thirty or forty boys. Every pupil had a seat and a small desk of his own. Seeing these desks, with inkstands sunk into their tops, and special grooves for the penholders, and lids that could be raised, Keith knew that he must pass the examinations or die from a broken heart.

The officiating teachers were stern but not unkind. Keith was nervous from eagerness, but neither frightened nor embarrassed. The questions asked were ridiculously easy, he thought. When his turn came, he answered triumphantly, as if he had been playing a game in which he was quite skilled. Finding him willing and well prepared, the examiners felt themselves challenged and pressed him more and more. Still he held his own. It ended with a sense of triumph on his part, but nothing was said about his having passed.

The wait that followed until all the boys had been questioned was the only difficult part of the ordeal. Waiting patiently was not a strong point with Keith. Finally his mother appeared to take him home, and the moment he looked at her he knew. She was in such high spirits that she had to try a joke.

"Too bad you couldn't pass," she said in a voice she vainly tried to make sad.

He knew it was a joke, and yet his heart leaped into his throat and his eyes filled with tears. Then she had to console him, and to do so, she let out the whole story. The teachers had told her that he knew enough to go right into the third grade, but on account of his age they had advised her not to let him start above the second grade. It was a whole year saved, but that

was not what she was thinking of. Her son had distinguished himself by giving proof of a brightness that had aroused unusual attention among the teachers. Her pride in this fact was such that Keith really began to think that a new life was about to begin for him.

And that night, when his father came home, the whole story had to be told over again with new details, and Keith had the pleasure of seeing an expression of undisguised satisfaction on his father's face. It did not last very long, but it was sweet to watch while it lasted. Then the father resumed his usual manner of stern indifference as he turned to the boy:

"That's all very well, Keith, but it means also that they will expect more of you than of the other boys, and so you have to study harder than ever in order to make good with them."

Keith didn't care. It had been a wonderful day, he felt. He had had his first taste of public approval, and he had noticed the effect of it on his father and mother. As for the need of studying—that was easy. And he didn't have to begin his studies at once anyhow.

II

AFTER the opening of the term, it took Keith only a day or two to realize that, literally, he had entered a new world, quite different, in spirit as well as in appearance, from anything previously experienced.

The first shock came as soon as he had taken his place in the class and the first lesson had begun. He was no longer Keith. Christian names were not at all in use. Everybody was addressed by his family name both by the teachers and by his fellow pupils. Keith had become Wellander, and the first time he heard himself called by that name he blushed as deeply as if his most intimate privacy had suddenly been violated. In a few hours, however, the unfamiliarity of the name as a standing appellation had worn off, and then the pride of the thing sent a pleasant glow through his whole body, making him for a brief, dizzy moment glimpse the glory of manhood.

His next discovery went far deeper. He had attended school four years in succession, but only as you drop into a strange room on a visit. He had never belonged in or to the school, and the school had neither limited nor extended his individuality. Now he found himself completely taken possession of and made a part of something larger than himself, a carefully correlated and guarded system of ranks and rules and traditions. In retrospect the former school seemed as accidental and fleeting as a street crowd, while the new one was an institution with a jealously preserved and deeply revered history to which each new pupil was expected to add more lustre. But most remarkable of all seemed the fact that this collective body added something to the stature of every boy that became a part of it.

Membership was as onerous as it was honourable, not only within the school precints but anywhere. To belong to "Old Mary" was to carry a sacred duty along wherever one went. She was like an ambitious parent,

ever jealous of the reputation of her children. Mostly it was a question of refraining from this or that thing which less conspicuously placed boys might venture at will, but at times it might imply the performance of fierce deeds of bravery in the face of overwhelming odds. There was the rival school of St. Catherine and several "popular" schools that had no social standing whatsoever, but contained pupils with harder fists and less generous ideas of fighting than any boy within Old Mary. When certain words of derision were flung upon the air by members of those inferior institutions, there was nothing left for a pupil of St. Mary's but to fight.

Little by little these strange facts penetrated Keith's consciousness and set up a never ending conflict between pride and precaution, between his wish to rise to a new ideal and his instinctive tendency to obey his mother's almost hysterical injunctions against fighting of any kind. Fortunately his road to and from school permitted him to follow the principal streets where the traffic was sufficient to act as a check on combative youngsters, and an additional protection was derived from his small size which caused the hostile elements to overlook his existence unless he appeared in the company of more developed schoolmates. And as he mostly walked alone, his comings and goings were uneventful as a rule. But that did not prevent him from imagining dangers and to suffer from them almost as much as if they had been real. There were times when he could not help thinking of himself as a coward.

Such estimates of himself were not wholly checked by an incident that occurred within the school precincts early in the first term. There was another boy in the

same class named Bauer, who seemed the living counterpart of Keith—just as undersized and lonely and nervous. From the first there was a hostile tension between those two, and soon it came to open war. It broke out in a pause between two lessons when practically all the boys were gathered in the schoolyard. Before Keith quite knew what had happened, he found himself fighting Bauer. First they used their fists and then they wrestled. The rest of the boys formed a ring about them and egged them on.

They were well matched in their common weakness, and both developed a certain courage during the stress of conflict. The difference between them was that Bauer apparently wanted to lick Keith, while the latter thought of nothing but to defend himself. The idea of inflicting pain on another human being was so foreign to Keith that it never took tangible form in his mind. The result was that Bauer's greater aggressiveness carried the day, and soon Keith found himself prone on his back with a triumphant Bauer straddling his chest.

At that moment both boys became guilty of serious breaches against time-honoured school etiquette. Bauer struck the defenceless Keith square in the face with his clenched fist, and Keith burst into tears. Quick as a flash one of the older boys grabbed Bauer by the scruff of his neck and hurled him halfway across the yard, while another one plucked Keith from the ground and shoved him toward the stairway with a contemptuous:

"The classroom for cry-babies."

The humiliation felt by Keith was so intense that he wondered whether he could stay in the school

Nothing but the thought of his father kept him from running home. But the cloud had a silver lining. Though no one else knew, he knew that he had started crying from rage, and not from fear. And this fact in connection with his realization of not having had any thought of running away during the fight made him hesitate in his final judgment upon himself. But he felt quite sure that fighting was not his chosen field. The effect on his nerves was too damaging.

III

IN the lower three grades, a single teacher with the title of Class Principal had complete charge of the morals, manners and instruction of the children in his grade. Keith had the luck of falling into the hands of one of the kindest and shrewdest men in the school—a man who seemed to understand that his mission was to guide rather than to drive, and who, in addition to his broad, human sympathy, possessed a genuine sense of humour.

His name was Lector Dahlström, but everybody spoke of him as Dally, and little did he care. He was large of body and large of mind, with a most impressive girth and a voice that commanded attention without grating on supersensitive nerves. He had very rarely to assert his authority, but if ever the need arose, none remained long in doubt as to who was the master, and a recurrence of the offense was unheard of. Even in such occasions he never used corporal punishment,

although at that time the right of such administration still remained with him. He simply appealed to the self-respect and the sense of fairness in his pupils, asking no one to render what lay beyond his capacity. The main secret of his hold on the boys, however, lay in his ability to keep them interested, and to do so he frequently broke away from the text books and time-worn pedagogical methods. If there was anything he depised, it was learning things by rote.

The boys sat in rows of four and were placed with regard to scholarship and behaviour, so that the best pupils were farthest away from the teacher and the least reliable ones right in front of him. Keith found himself number two in the class, and that position at first tickled his pride considerably. Later, as the term went by, and boys now and then were shifted up or down, he began to wonder why he always remained number two. It was reassuring in a way, as showing that he held his own, but he failed to see why another boy should always remain *primus,* although his performances during lessons did not surpass those of Keith. Once he dared even give utterance to some such speculation in his father's hearing, but was promptly put down with a stern:

"If the teacher puts another boy above you, he has probably some very good reason for doing so, and you had better feel thankful for being where you are in the class."

"Humph," said his mother. "You forget, Carl, that the father of that boy is one of the richest bankers in the city."

This was a way of looking at it which had never oc-

curred to Keith. He was pretty contented, on the whole, and like all the rest, he placed the most implicit trust in the teacher's justice. From the very start, he had a feeling that Dally kept a special eye on him, and yet he was rarely spoken to except when questions were passed around. Even then the teacher was rather apt to leave Keith alone to such an extent that the boy now and then began to think himself disliked. Always, however, when he got to this point, some little incident would occur that restored his faith both in himself and in the teacher.

There could be no doubt that he knew his lessons as well as any one in the class, if not better, and he shone still more when Dally appealed to the natural intelligence of the boys by straying far away from the beaten and dusty path of the text books. Whenever he had stirred them by some excursion of this kind and began to ask questions in order to find out how far they had followed him, Keith's right hand was sure to shoot excitedly upwards in order to get him the coveted chance of answering. And it seemed as if he could answer almost every question asked except a few that went so far beyond the bounds laid down for the class that the teacher deemed it fair to warn them that inability to answer would be no shame. That was the kind of questions Dally generally reserved for Keith, and when Keith couldn't answer, it didn't console him very much that no one else could. Once, when his hand went up as usual and, to his astonishment, he obtained the permission to answer, Keith, to his still greater astonishment, suddenly discovered that he had no answer to give.

"I thought so," said Dally with a broad grin on his good-humoured face. "Do you know what a fuzzy-wuzz is, Wellander?"

Keith shook his head, his face crimson with chagrin and humiliation as the whole class burst into anticipatory laughter.

"That's a chap who wants to do all of it all the time," explained Dally.

Keith did not quite see the point, but he kept his right arm a little more in check for a while after that, until one day the lesson was forgotten and history repeated itself.

"Now Keith is fuzzy-wuzzying again," said Dally, and Keith thought he would sink through the floor. His mind was quite made up never to ask permission to answer another question again, but that same afternoon, during the lesson in Swedish history, Dally dropped all questioning and asked Keith to explain to the class the main factors leading up to the Wars of Reformation—which Keith spent twenty minutes in doing while all the rest of the class had to sit still listening to him.

IV

KEITH could not remain isolated to the same extent as in the earlier schools. Inevitable community sprang from similarity of sex and age alone. In the same direction worked the system

of teaching which called for the united attention of the entire class during every moment of the lesson. It was impossible to form a part of the class without coming in contact with all its other members. The boy who read aloud or answered a question became subjected to the criticism or admiration of all the rest. Rivalry in any field of study was just as likely to arise between two boys at different ends of the room as between those sitting side by side. The spirit of Dally tended to assist this fusion of personalities in every way, and the boy who kept apart was sure sooner or later to run foul of his good-humoured but well-aimed sallies. His attitude implied no tyranny, and he strove for no deadening conformity. On the contrary, he always spoke of a strongly marked individuality as the object of all education, but he tried to develop it by fearless contact with others rather than by jealous withdrawal.

Keith for the first time found himself part of a society, and he liked it because the teacher's insistence on scholarly achievement as the only standard of comparison gave him a chance to hold his own among a group of boys, most of whom counted themselves his superiors in every other respect. He was small and poor, of humble origin, without influential connections, without worldly advantages of any kind, but when mind was pitched against mind, he felt second to none —except in mathematics, where he could compete neither with Davidson, the Jewish banker's son who was *primus,* or with that gawky, cumbersome Anderson, whose dullness in every other respect always kept him near the bottom of the class. For this reason

Keith differed from most of the others by liking school better during the lessons than at any other time.

There were games in the schoolyard during the pauses, and some of these were played in large groups or by teams. This occurred particularly when echoes from some war abroad caused the whole school to divide into rival armies for the staging of regular battles, as during his second year, when all had to be Turks or Russians. But Keith didn't like battles except in books, and mostly the pauses broke up the class communities into small coteries or pairs. And the moment this happened, Keith found himself outside. He belonged to no special group. His appearance in the yard raised no delighted hails. He had no chum of his very own with whom to exchange secrets or lay plans for common adventures. And but for Dally, he would probably have spent most of his free time in the classroom.

It was worse when the big pause came at eleven and every one went home for lunch, or when three o'clock brought school to a close for the day. Going to school alone was an experience shared by all, but on leaving it, the hurrying horde of youngsters, exuberant with freedom as so many colts, broke into little groups of two or three that had homes in the same neighbourhood. Now and then Keith would join a couple of other boys headed for the old City like himself, and they would not refuse his company, but there always was something between him and them that precluded real fellowship, and so he trudged his way homeward alone most of the time. Then he was also sure of reaching home in the shortest possible time, so that his mother had no chance to become worried over him.

It did happen now and then that a larger group was formed for some unusual exploit and that Keith became part of it by chance rather than choice. Once he accompanied such a group to that part of the harbour where tall-masted fullriggers with foreign flags lay nose by stern in unbroken line along the quay. Strange odours, fragrant or repulsive, filled the air. Jolly, loud-voiced men toiled mightily or lounged like monarchs among piles of casks and bags and boxes. For once Keith lost his usual timidity under such circumstances and threw himself whole-heartedly into anything the gang suggested. He even ventured to climb the mast of a ship as far as the foretop. When at last reluctantly he turned homeward, he felt like a hero, but when he caught sight of the tear-stained, fretted face of his mother, he knew at once that even such exaltation was not worth the price to be paid for it.

Unfortunately he had made himself popular that afternoon, and the next time a gang formed for a similar purpose, he was asked to join. But he shook his head, and being foolishly truthful by nature, he blurted out an embarrassed:

"My mother won't let me."

The answer was passed along. It was repeated in school the next day. Keith heard echoes of it for weeks. And it added a good deal to the invisible wall that seemed to rise about him wherever he went.

Yet he was not unhappy. There was in his nature a wonderful resiliency that never let his spirits drop beyond a certain point, and that always brought them back to highwater mark at the slightest encouragement.

V

HE had discovered the school library. It was to him a marvellous treasure trove. Any book could be taken home, one at a time, after being registered with the teacher acting as librarian for the day. Nor were the books handed out to you arbitrarily. You browsed all by yourself, and picked and picked, and calculated, and went back on your choice a dozen times, until at last you struck a book so fascinating in its promises that all hesitation disappeared.

The father started to object, but was silenced by the explanation that the school authorities wanted the boys to borrow books from the library. That settled it, for discipline came first and even pleasure must be allowed if required by discipline. Had Keith been less honest or more imaginative in what may be called practical matters, his father's regard for authority might have offered more than one chance at liberties now denied, but this possibility never occurred to him, and so the library remained his one avenue of escape.

The books he chose puzzled and almost shocked the rotatory guardians of his sanctum. Once he picked an enormous volume on Greek mythology, full of pictures and translated passages from Homer and the dramatists.

"You don't want that, Wellander," the teacher said,

eyeing him curiously, when Keith presented the book for registration.

"Yes, I do," replied Keith stoutly, but his heart began to quake at the thought that the cherished volume was going to be denied him.

"Do you mean to say that you intend to read it through?" the teacher persisted.

"Yes, I will," said Keith.

There was a long pause during which the teacher seemed to weigh the book in his hand as if wondering whether its very weight would be too much for the undersized little chap in front of him.

"All right," he said at last, "but I suppose that means you will have reading for the rest of this season."

Keith looked at the book more hopefully, and with hope came courage.

"I'll read it in three weeks," he said.

So he did, too, and when he turned in the book, the same teacher happened to be on duty, recognized him, and began to ask questions. When Keith had proved that the whole Olympian hierarchy was duly installed in his acquisitive brain, the teacher said with an amused but friendly smile:

"I think we shall let you have anything you want hereafter. What is it to be this time—philosophy?"

"No, I want another book of exploration," answered Keith, thawing under the smile. "And I want a real good one."

That was his favourite subject, and the book he chose was Speke's "Discovery of the Source of the Nile." Once launched on that memorable journey, he had no thought left for any explorations of his own.

VI

DURING the fall and spring terms of that first year Keith had no sense of time. Days and weeks and months rolled by so smoothly that their passing was unnoticed. It is a question whether at any other period of his life—with one possible exception—he was more completely interested and, for that reason, satisfied.

One day he observed casually that the old trees in the churchyard sported tiny green leaves under a deliciously blue but still rather cold sky. A few days more, and he heard that commencement was at hand.

It was a time of great excitement in school. Who would pass and who would not? Falling through might mean another year in the same class, but beyond all doubt it meant a summer spent at work instead of playing. It was worse than a disgrace. It was a menace to liberty at the time of the year when liberty meant most.

Being second in the class, it never occurred to Keith that he might fail of promotion to a higher grade, but at that end there were possible prizes to consider. The class was full of gossip and speculation. Boys who had hardly spoken to each other before broke into heated discussions or formed belated friendships. In one way and another the fever infected Keith and spread from him to his parents, though his father as usual feigned

complete indifference. From his mother he learned long before the startling fact was meant to reach his ears, that his father had actually asked a day off at the bank in order to attend the exercises. This news increased Keith's fear by several degrees. He had no idea what might happen, and it would be unthinkably dreadful to have the father present if anything went wrong. But on the other hand, if . . . well, what was there to happen anyhow?

On the morning of the great day, a host of parents and relatives and other interested spectators crowded into the big assembly hall where places were reserved for them in the rear and along the walls. In the meantime the pupils gathered in their respective class-rooms, and from there they marched by twos to the hall, the lowest grade leading. Every boy was in his best clothes, and every one showed his nervousness in his own peculiar way. Keith laughed hysterically a few times before they started, and then he turned into an automaton that breathed and moved and heard and saw only as part of a gigantic machine. His own individuality seemed to melt and become a mere drop in the all-inclusive individuality of the school.

This mood lasted through the early part of the exercises, the prayer read by the *primus* of the senior class, the hymn singing, the Rector's speech, and so on. Everything came to him as out of a mist, and he was not even sufficiently conscious of himself to look around for a glimpse of his parents. When the distribution of prizes began, the whole atmosphere changed. Until then it had been collective and impersonal. Now it became intensely personal. Every one wanted to hear. Necks were craned, whispered questions asked. It

was as if a sudden breeze had stirred waters which until then had been still as the mirroring surface of a forest pool. Keith's mood changed with the rest, and he grew painfully conscious of himself and his surroundings.

Starting with the lowest grade, the Rector read out the names of the prize winners, the character of the prizes, and sometimes the reasons why they were bestowed. At the mention of each name, a boy rose from his seat, squirmed past his closely packed comrades, marched up the centre aisle to the platform, bowed awkwardly to the Rector, grabbed the prize, bowed still more awkwardly if possible, and marched back to his seat with a face that burned or blanched, grinned or glowed, according to temperament.

The second grade was soon reached. Most of the prizes consisted of books. Davidson, *primus,* got two gilt-edged volumes of poetry. Keith caught a glimpse of them and experienced a twinge of envy. His heart was beating so that he thought he could hear it. His eyes clung to the Rector's mouth, and when the next name was read, he half rose. Then he sank back, and around him an ominous stillness seemed to reign.

The name was that of Runge, *tertius,* who got some historical work. Then *quartus,* Blomberg, who was a passionate botanist, received a valuable text book on his favourite subject. Still the rector went on, and Keith felt sure that his name had been passed over by some mistake, and that now it would come.

"A German lexicon for special attention to the study of that language," the Rector droned on.

Again Keith started to rise from his seat, but even as he did so, it flashed through his mind that he had

given no more attention to German than to other studies.

". . . to Otto Krass of the Second Grade," the Rector completed his sentence, holding out a book.

As Keith sank back on the bench, Krass, *quintus,* rose with an expression on his face as if he had become personally invovled in a particularly incredible miracle.

A whisper ran through the rest of the class. Glances were cast at Keith, who felt them like so many lashes on bare skin although in every other respect he had once more become utterly unconscious of what happened about him.

By slow degrees he recovered so far that he could try to think, but the process was unendurable. There could be no accident. It was a deliberate slight aimed at him for some specific reason. He tried to think of the past year and its happenings in and out of school, but this effort produced no solution to the riddle.

Suddenly he bethought himself of his speculations concerning his place in the class. It seemed that he had been deeply envious of Davidson all that year. With a quick turn of the head he surveyed for a moment the haughty expression and narrowly drawn features of the boy beside him. There was a trace of a sneer on that face, and again Keith's heart was flooded with resentment. But this mood changed abruptly into contriteness. Perhaps he was being punished by some one, by God—he hesitated at that thought—for grudging his schoolmate the place and the honours that he probably had deserved. Keith felt the meanest of the mean. . . .

Krass was back in his seat showing his book. He showed it to Keith also, but with a palpable embarrass-

ment that touched the latter as an additional blow. Keith tried to say that it was nice, but his lips were too dry and stiff to produce a sound.

The Rector was still reading off names. To save himself from his own thoughts, Keith tried to listen. Soon he noticed that, without fail, the prizes went in unbroken sequence to the first four or five pupils in every grade. And suddenly he wondered whether his father and mother had noticed. What would they say? What could *he* say?

Then he remembered his mother's remark on hearing about his place in the class, and he wondered if it could be possible. . . . But the parents of Krass had neither wealth nor position. That much he knew.

The Rector's voice and manner became more and more impressive, and the prizes more and more valuable, as he passed higher and higher, until at last the senior class was reached—the boys who were now graduating into the *gymnasium*. They were his own pupils, and for each of the prize winners from the two branches of that class he had a word of special praise and good-will.

A restless stirring passed through the assembly as the boy expected to be the last recipient of special honours made his way to the platform and everybody prepared to rise for the singing of a closing hymn.

Still the old Rector, with his smooth-shaven and deeply furrowed Roman face, remained standing, and once more an expectant hush fell upon pupils and spectators. Apparently he intended, contrary to custom, to follow up the main ceremony of the day with some important announcement.

"One more prize remains to be distributed," he re-

sumed with more than usual deliberation. "We do not have the pleasure of bestowing it regularly, because its conditions are unusual. It was the will of the donor that it should be given to that pupil who, regardless of grade and age, during the previous year had shown the relatively greatest aptitude, industry, and actual advance in knowledge. This year the prize, which consists of one hundred crowns in gold and is the largest at the disposal of our school, is to be distributed, and the pupil found worthy of this exceptional honour is. . . ."

Every eye was on the Rector as he paused dramatically. Every one in the hall listened breathlessly to catch the favoured name. Keith listened like the rest, a little enviously perhaps, but without serious attention, for it had just occurred to him for the tenth time that his situation would have been so much less unbearable if only his father had stayed away.

". . . this pupil is Keith Wellander of the Second Grade," the Rector concluded.

A murmur swept the hall, and Keith felt himself the centre of many eyes. The murmur grew as the winner failed to appear, but Keith could not move a limb. Dumbly and unbelievingly he stared at the Rector and the group of teachers seated around him on the platform.

"Come forward, Wellander," the Rector said in a kindly voice as if he could well understand the overwhelming effect of such distinction. At the same time Keith noticed Lector Dahlström rising partly from his seat on the platform as if to see whether anything might be the matter.

Had the ceiling opened and an angel appeared in a fiery chariot to call him heavenward, the boy could not

have been more startled. It was as if a terrific blow had paralyzed all his senses. His classmates had to push him forward. He never knew how he reached the platform, where the Rector was waiting for him with a small package ready for delivery. Keith felt the weight of that package in his own hand and the gentle touch of the Rector's hand on his head. Words were uttered that he did not catch, and the room became filled with the noise of boisterous applause.

He bowed mechanically and turned to walk back to his seat, and as he did so, he noticed a white handkerchief waving at him from the rear of the hall. Behind the handkerchief he caught a glimpse of his mother's face, and a thought shot through his head:

"Papa is here and has heard all this!"

Then he relapsed into a state of utter oblivion of the surrounding world. The thing was too tremendous to be felt even. Automatically he moved out of the hall and back to the classroom with the rest. Dally was saying things to him, but he could not grasp a word. Now and then he became vaguely conscious of awed glances cast at him by the other boys. Some of them spoke to him, and in some strange way he managed to realize that Davidson was not among these.

At last he woke into full consciousness on the street, where he found himself walking homeward by his father's hand. The pressure of that hand seemed unusually soft and pleasant. The mother was talking eagerly and wiping her eyes between little happy bursts of laughter. The father listened for a long while in silence.

"Yes," he said at last, "it is not a bad beginning—if he can keep it up."

Keith felt for a moment as if he were walking on air, and he knew that he would keep it up—that after such a day nothing could prevent him from keeping it up. Then a bewildering thought appeared out of nowhere and began to buzz in his tired and over-excited brain.

"If I have done all that the Rector said," this thought demanded of him, "why in the world has Dally kept me sitting below Davidson who got nothing but books?"

VII

KEITH next day was permitted to have a good look at the five twenty-crown pieces found in the package handed to him by the Rector. Their weight and brightness made them delightful to handle, but they were not "toys for children" his father remarked, and with that remark they passed out of sight for ever. Once or twice he put timid questions to his mother, who never answered directly, but reminded him of all the money his father had spent and was spending on him for food and clothes and schooling and all sorts of things. Keith almost wished that he had received some nice books instead, or anything that could make him feel that he really had got a big glorious reward for something he really had done. Now the achievement seemed as illusive as the reward. He tried to reason the case out with himself, and the conclusion at which he arrived was that his father

probably was entitled and certainly welcome to the money, but that as he, Keith, had earned it and owned it, something should be said to him about the use of it. And as so often was the case, it became a question of abstract justice. The value and possibilities of the money lay beyond his grasp, but the ethics of its disposal, from his simple childish point of view, seemed too clear for serious discussion. Once or twice he stole a look at his savings bank book, which his mother kept among her own papers, but no new entry appeared on its meagre credit side. By and by he almost lost sight of the whole incident, engrossed as he was with the experiences of the current hour, but the memory of it recurred fitfully, and in moments of dissatisfaction it tended to assume the shape of a grievance, if not a charge, against the father. From this tendency he fled instinctively to an idea of money as not worth bothering about. And that idea also helped when the atmosphere of worry about money matters surrounding his mother became too intense and depressive.

There was comparatively little of it that summer. His mother was in better health and spirits than he had seen her for a long time, and she was as happy as Keith when the father announced that they would have a summer place of their own on one of the islands in Lake Maelaren, somewhat farther out than the one where Uncle Laube lived. It was too far away to have become absorbed by the rapidly growing city, and yet too close at hand to be quite desirable as a summer location for the more prosperous. The island was of sufficient size to hold a couple of real farms in its centre, while the shore line was occupied by occasional villas. Halfway between these two mutually foreign

regions, on a sharp slope that still remained largely uncleared, stood a little red house with just two rooms in it. One of these was occupied by the old couple that owned the house. The other one had been rented to the Wellanders for the summer, and in that one room the mother, the grandmother and Keith established themselves, with the father appearing as a regular week-end guest.

Taking it all in all, it was the freest, and in many ways the happiest summer of Keith's childhood. He was permitted to roam around pretty much as he pleased, and there were several other small boys to play with, none of them enterprising enough to arouse the distrust of Keith's mother. They were all city boys, however, as foreign to nature as Keith, and there was no older person on hand to give their excursions and games a constructive twist without turning them into lessons. There was plenty of wild life about, and it helped in many ways to give them a better time, but that was as near as they got to it. Exactly the same thing happened during subsequent summers, and so the boy always looked upon flowers and trees and birds and insects as delightful but puzzling representatives of a world of which he did not know the language.

It was good fun, however, and temporarily it took Keith farther away from himself and from his cherished books than he had been since his first discovery of the latter. The boys proved decent, wholesome company, more bent on discharging their surplus energy than on doing mischief. Much of their time was spent in or near the water, so that Keith developed into a pretty good swimmer for his age, though always of the cautious type. And between games they would

discuss the world from a boy's point of view. There was particularly one boy of the same age as Keith with whom he had talks of a kind quite new to him. Oscar's parents were still very young, and he spoke of them more as chums than as masters. And he spoke of them with a sort of restrained enthusiasm that set Keith thinking very hard. He loved his parents, especially his mother, and admired them, especially his father at certain times, but he was not conscious of any feeling about them corresponding to the one displayed by Oscar, whose father, after all, was nothing but a captain on one of the small steam sloops running between the city and some of the surrounding islands.

Oscar was especially eloquent when he spoke of the love his parents had for each other. He gave examples that seemed exaggerated to Keith, but nevertheless impressed him. In return Keith boasted similarly of his own parents, and he meant every word he said, but always what he had to tell fell short of the pictures drawn by Oscar.

"You don't understand," cried Oscar one day when again they were debating this fascinating topic all by themselves. "It's all right for your mother to kiss your father when he leaves and when he returns, and to be looking for him all the time. But that's not enough. That's not the way my parents love each other. And I don't think your father cares so very much for your mother. But my father is so much in love with my mother that he would like to eat what she has chewed!"

"No—o!" protested Keith, rather appalled by the illustration used, and yet feeling as if he had beheld

some undiscovered country. There was a pause during which he stared incredulously at Oscar.

"I mean just what I said," insisted Oscar a little more quietly after a while. "Anything that has to do with my mother is sweet to my father, I tell you. And that is love. If you don't know it, you don't know what love is either."

"But why," demanded Keith, his mind still so full of the disturbing image called forth by Oscar that his jaws moved uneasily as if he had taken into his mouth something unpalatable.

"Because," Oscar hesitated . . . "because it is that way."

Keith left shortly afterwards to think it over in solitude. It was probably the first time the word love had been presented to him as anything but a commonplace term for laudable but commonplace feelings. He puzzled over it, but to little purpose, and for some reason he thought it useless or unwise to ask his mother for information.

VIII

THE third grade proved merely a continuation of the second. Little had changed over summer. A few boys had been dropped behind and a few others overtaken. That affected the bottom of the class, but not the top. Dally remained their principal, and when he welcomed them back at the open-

ing of the fall term, Keith waited excitedly for the distribution of places. Few changes were made however. Davidson remained *primus* as before, with Keith next. Then came Runge and Blomberg as before. For a day or two Keith swung violently between fits of rebellion and deep depression. It seemed almost incredible that he could have received the highest prize bestowed on any pupil in the school.

Then the routine of instruction and study seized him. New text-books were acquired, not without some grumbling on his father's part. New interests were stirred and, as usual, cleverly nursed by Dally. Above all, the magnetic power of the teacher asserted itself once more, until Keith felt that the only thing really worth while in life was to please him.

Algebra was one of the new subjects, and the use of letters instead of figures amused Keith for a while. But it took no serious hold on his mind. The whole field of mathematics left him strangely uninterested, although he was good at arithmetic. He thought the problems of Euclid stupid. Once he had learned how to prove a theorem, it seemed so ridiculously self-evident that he wondered why anybody should bother his brain about it. There were other boys who could figure out the demonstrations in advance without looking at the book. Keith tried it once or twice, but failed miserably and gave it up as a worthless and thankless job. Apparently his brain did not work in that way. It had to touch real life to be at its best. History and geography were his favourite subjects, and in those he led the class. This was openly admitted by Dally himself.

Literature was another new subject. They read and analysed and criticized classical Swedish poetry—Tegnér and Runeberg and Geijer. Most of the poems chosen for the purpose were historical and took their themes from the old viking days or from the glorious centuries of Gustavus Adolphus and Charles XII, when Sweden so nearly rose to be a great power. Keith liked to take certain sonorous passages into his mouth. There was a satisfying fullness and richness about them that seemed somehow to enhance his own feeling of self-importance. Their rhythm also pleased him and became a sort of substitute for the singing of which he was incapable. Chiefly, however, it was the stories told by the poems that interested him, and on the whole he did not think much of poetry. But this opinion he never dared to put into words. To do so in the face of Dally's clearly manifested reverence would have been like openly confessing a particularly degrading form of inferiority.

Nor did it seem to matter so very much what he studied. The main thing always remained what Dally said and did in his efforts to bring out something within the self of each boy for which only he seemed to have an eye. Keith at times felt as if he would give anything to know what Dally expected of him in particular. He felt sure that it must be something wonderful, and he had odd moments of almost being on the verge of grasping it, but in the end it always eluded him, and no sooner was he out of Dally's presence than the whole thing seemed very unreal and foolish.

IX

YOUNG Davidson had a bent toward sarcasm that sometimes lured him out of his usual cold aloofness. In one of these rare communicative moments he said of little Loth that he crossed the equator at least once a week and didn't mind. He referred to the fact that Loth was more frequently moved than any other pupil but always managed to retain a place near the centre. And no matter what fate might bring him of ups or downs, Loth always retained a perfect composure. Yet he was small and nervous and highstrung like Keith and Bauer. One day Keith asked him how he could stand being shoved about like that.

"Because my father says I am going into business anyhow," answered Loth, "and I don't know whether I hate business or books most."

"What would you like to do," asked Keith looking puzzled.

"Draw," said Loth vaguely, "and play the piano and go to the theatre, and—yes, and read poetry books that don't teach you anything."

This view of life was so new to Keith that he really tried to become acquainted with Loth in order to learn more about it. His own indifference to anything but books promised small success, but in the end a tie was found in their common love of tin soldiers. So he was

admitted to Loth's particular circle and was even invited to Loth's home for a birthday party—the first and last of its kind that he attended during his five years at Old Mary. Before permitted to go, he was warned that the servant girl would come for him at nine. No amount of pleading helped to ameliorate that condition.

Loth's father was a prosperous storekeeper on West Long Street and lived in a spacious and richly furnished apartment above the store. It was a home like that revealed to Keith through his shortlived friendship with Harald. The impression on Keith, however, was quite different because of his own growth since that first year at school. And the actions of the eight or ten boys who were the other guests impressed him still more. They wore gloves when they arrived. They showed neither forwardness nor timidity, but greeted each other and their host with grown-up dignity and formality. They seemed to know what to do at every moment, and how to do it. Keith was accustomed to decent manners. Social intercourse in the parental circle was not without grace, but this was something different. At the time he was utterly incapable of telling where the difference lay, and years afterward he realized what subtle shadings it depended on. The main thing at the time was that something in himself responded instinctively to the higher degree of polish and self-assurance which he now for the first time was able to observe at close quarters.

The principal entertainment of the evening was a monster battle with tin soldiers on the cleared floor of the huge dining-room. The battle was at its height and supper was not yet in sight, when Keith learned

that the girl was waiting for him. There was nothin to do but to obey, but the hostess could not think o letting him go without having eaten. A special servic was prepared for him in the kindest way possible, an Keith enjoyed very much the many dainties offered him Nevertheless he felt the situation as humiliating an was actually glad when he got away at last. But th gladness was only a surface gloss on a burning core o regrets and dissatisfaction.

In a way that evening, which was never repeated proved a new starting point in his life. He had ha his first close contact with life on a higher social level and he could not forget it. New standards had bee furnished him, and unconsciously he was applying them all the time to all sorts of things—his parents included Until then he had blindly accepted them and their ways and their environment as representing the best thi world had to offer. Now the basis had been laid fo doubts that gradually developed into positive criti- cism.

The immediate result seemed quite irrelevant. He developed a sudden objection to running errands for his mother, and especially to doing anything that involved the carrying of bags or bottles or baskets through the streets. Packages looking as if they might contain books remained unobjectional. There was a time when being sent to the grocery store was a privilege and a distinction. Later it became an opportunity for clan- destine meetings with Johan. Even during his first year at Old Mary he continued to perform such tasks without any thought of what others might think of them. He must have heard things, however, and inner resistances must have developed, which were now

brought into sudden appearance by the inner echoes of Loth's birthday party.

He did not dare to breathe a word about his new state of mind in his father's presence. And it was long before he gathered courage to voice it openly before his mother. But he used all the arguments and evasions and tricks he could muster to escape what had become a dreaded ordeal. It developed into a test of will and strength between Keith and his mother—the first of its kind, and the forerunner of numerous others still more deep-reaching. After a while the father discovered or learned what was going on, but, contrary to custom, that was not enough to settle the matter. In this case neither argument nor threats had any effect on Keith. He avoided open conflict with his father for good and sufficient reason, and he did what could not be escaped, but he did it in a spirit of passionate rebellion that introduced a new element of division and strife into the home. Both parents seemed instinctively to interpret the boy's changed attitude as a reflection on themselves, and they resented it keenly, but to no avail. While pretending to insist on full obedience as before, they gave way in reality by making the servant girl do the errands in place of Keith.

"One of these days I suppose we shall not be good enough for you any longer," said his mother bitterly one day while the contest was still on.

"Why, mamma," cried Keith, disturbed by the emotional appeal back of her words, "what has that to do with my not wanting to be laughed at by other boys?"

"I almost wish I hadn't persuaded your father to send you to the public school," the mother rejoined.

X

THE school year was drawing to its close again. Dally's tone grew less bantering. On several occasions he delivered little impromptu sermons on the seriousness of life and the difficulties of living. One afternoon about two weeks before commencement he told them to close their books.

"I want each one of you to tell me what you expect to become in life, or what kind of a career your parents have chosen for you."

A stir of excitement swept over the class.

Then Dally went on to explain why he wished to know. The first three grades were divided into A and B classes, but that had nothing to do with the teaching, which was the same in both classes. The fourth and fifth grades, on the other hand, were divided into a "Latin" and an "English" branch, with quite different curricula. Boys headed for the various professions ought to choose the former branch, while the second one led to more practical pursuits.

"You are going to be an officer, I understand," Dally said, turning to *primus*.

"Yes, sir," the young Jew answered with a self-importance that even Keith could not miss. "My father wants me to try for the General Staff, and so I have to specialize on mathematics."

"Humph," was Dally's only audible comment as he

made a note, but he looked as if he had tasted something unpleasant.

"And you, Wellander," asked the teacher.

"I am going to be an explorer," replied Keith without a moment's hesitation, and the whole class broke into a roar of laughter with Dally joining them.

Keith, as usual, blushed a deep crimson, but did not move.

"That's neither a trade nor a profession," said Dally after a while, still smiling. "I fear you are fuzzy-wuzzying again, Wellander. What do you mean by an explorer?"

"One who explores rivers and deserts and unknown countries and such things," said Keith brazenly.

"And you really mean that you are going in for that sort of thing?"

"I do," Keith insisted, while the whole class watched him in a hush that might easily turn either into derision or into approval.

"There isn't much exploring left to be done," Dally mused, looking intently at the small boy at the other end of the room. "Most of the globe is mapped already."

"There is a lot left in Africa," Keith retorted eagerly.

"And what does your father say about it," was Dally's next question.

There was a long pause broken only by some gigglings by the irrepressibles down at the bottom of the class.

"I have not asked him," Keith admitted at last. "But I am going to be an explorer just the same."

"In these days that means you have to become a scientist," Dally remarked in a changed tone. "It is

your only chance, and so I advise you to choose Latin It is what I think a boy with your head should tak anyhow."

"All right, Sir," assented Keith, flattered by th last part of Dally's remark and utterly ignorant o what his choice implied.

That evening he told his father that he had bee asked whether he wanted to enter the Latin or th English branch of the fourth grade, and that he ha chosen the former.

"Why," asked his father.

"Because Dally says I ought to," replied Keith.

"Well, he ought to know," said the father.

But when Keith appeared in the schoolyard durin one of the pauses next day, he was met from every sid by the cry:

"There's the explorer! There's the explorer!"

The younger boys jeered openly at him. The olde ones pretended to ask him serious questions about hi plans. For days he was the laughing stock of th whole school, and even on his way to and from schoo he was pursued by jibes and taunts. Through it al Keith stuck quietly to his guns, without a sign of re traction or evasion. And in the end his seriousnes conquered. But from that day he was known to th entire school as "the explorer," and he heard that tern more often than his own name.

XI

IT was the afternoon of the last day before commencement. The atmosphere in the class was solemn and more than a little wistful.

"It is our last hour together," said Dally when all were back in their seats after the pause. "History is on the schedule, but—schedules are not made for moments like these. Let us just have a friendly talk."

He did practically all the talking, and he talked to them more as an older boy, a chum with somewhat wider experience, than as a teacher and class principal. It made them feel their own importance rather heavily, but still more it made them conscious of an irreparable loss. They knew that school would not be the same in the fall, when Dally no longer was with them. In accordance with established custom, he would go back to the first grade and start piloting a new generation up to the point where they had just arrived.

The class would break up, too. Some would have to stay behind. One or two had gone as far as they could and would make a premature transfer from school to life. Others were bound for other schools or other cities. The rest would split in two and join with the corresponding parts of the parallel section to form two entirely new classes. It gave them a foretaste of what it would mean to graduate into the *gymnasium,* and from there into the university. And it filled their hearts with wistful pride.

The last hour was drawing to a close and everybody was talking at once, when Dally unexpectedly asked them to give him their full attention once more for a few minutes.

"An act of justice remains to be performed," he said. "There is a boy among you who has not received all that he had justly deserved. It was withheld from him by me for his own welfare. The time has now come when he and you should know all about it."

As he paused for a moment, the boys looked around at each other with something like consternation. Their curiosity was intense. He spoke with a tensity of feeling they had hardly ever noticed in him before, and not one of them had an inkling of what he was driving at.

"It means that some of you have received more than they deserved," he resumed. "That also should be known—for the good of all. It is a reflection on no one but myself, however, and I think you know me well enough by this time to be sure that I have been moved by no other consideration than the future good of the one most nearly concerned."

Again he stopped, the class waiting breathlessly for him to go on. At that moment Keith became aware that the teacher's gaze rested firmly on him with an expression that sent the blood in a hot stream to his face.

"Wellander," Dally began again, and in spite of the beating of his own heart, Keith noticed that the teacher's voice trembled a little as he spoke. "Will you do me the favour of rising a moment? You are the boy I have in mind."

Keith rose like an automaton. His eyes clung to

the lips of the teacher, and he seemed to expect from those lips some utterance that must make his whole future life different. As often happened in moments of intensified emotion, he became strangely oblivious of all the little eddies and cross-currents of thoughts and feelings that made up his ordinary, every-day consciousness of himself.

"For two years I have kept you number two in the class," Dally said, speaking in an easier tone as if to lighten the strain on everybody. "You should have been number one. Davidson, whom I placed above you, has at no time been your superior in anything but self-control. But it was just your—what I have sometimes called your fuzzy-wuzziness, that made me afraid of placing you where you rightly belonged, at the head of the class. It is my belief that you have in you greater gifts than any other boy in this class, but I am not yet sure of what you will do with them. It was my eagerness to see you make full use of them that made me poke fun at you and keep you out of the place that rightfully was yours. Perhaps I did wrong, but my meaning was right. I shall always watch you closely, and I hope you will try your best not to disappoint me. Will you promise that?"

"I will," gasped Keith.

The clock had already struck three. The moment Dally stopped, the class broke up, but only to gather about Keith—every one of them except Davidson, who slipped out of the room with a face white as chalk. Keith caught a glimpse of that face, and a sense of reckless elation shot through him.

He sped as never before on his way home. It was

still impossible for him to think the matter through. First he must tell his parents and hear what they had to say about it.

On hearing what had happened, his mother hugged and kissed him, her face all smiles while big tears dripped down her cheeks. Then the father came home and was told everything. His mother looked serious by that time, and Keith noticed a wavering expression in her voice.

"Your teacher evidently knows you," was the father's first remark to Keith, but by his tone the boy knew that he was pleased. Then he hesitated, and after a while he said as if speaking to himself: "But if Keith really had earned the first place. . . . "

"That's what I have been thinking," the mother broke in with blazing eyes. "Do you remember what I said about that boy Davidson? He was the richest boy in the class, and Lector Dahlström simply did not dare to put Keith above him. Now he is trying to make up for it when it's too late."

"Perhaps," said the father thoughtfully. "The sum of it is what I have always said: the coin that was made for a farthing will never be a dollar."

"But Keith was not made for a farthing," the mother retorted sharply and indignantly. "That is the main point of what his teacher confessed in school this very day."

"Well, if not," said the father wearily, "it is up to him to prove it."

And Keith, too, all of a sudden felt very, very tired.

XII

KEITH was one of the first to enter the class room on the morning of Commencement Day. He was still standing near the door when Davidson appeared and evidently meant to walk past him without a greeting.

"Say, Davidson," Keith cried impulsively, holding out his hand, "I don't mind!"

"Well, what do you think I care," the other boy asked icily as he turned on his heel and walked out of the room again without taking the proffered hand.

It was the first time that Keith felt the sting of real hatred. He could never have acted like that—not even toward one who had wronged him seriously. What galled him most was that he had been made to look as if he were apologizing. Then a sense of triumph returned little by little, but it was not very vivid, and what he missed utterly was the fact that no other situation could have been quite so hard on Davidson's pride as the one in which Dally had placed him. A realization of that fact came only years afterwards.

Then Dally himself arrived, and soon the commencement exercises were in full progress, Keith feeling quite superior to any curiosity or excitement. Again he received a prize, and again it was in the form of money, but a smaller sum not accompanied by any special encomiums. He walked home very quietly with

his parents, and they had not much to say either.

Had Keith known what an anti-climax was, he would undoubtedly have used that word to describe the experiences of his second Commencement Day at Old Mary.

XIII

THE summer was spent quietly on the same island where he had been so happy a year before. Oscar was not there. Other boys took his place, but no real intimacy sprang up between them and Keith. They certainly did not talk of love, and what they knew of sex took Keith back to the days spent around the big rock. He had a good time on the whole, but more and more a sense of missing something fretted him, and he could not tell what it was. For emotional outlet he was wholly dependent on his mother, and though he seemed as devoted to her as ever, he had queer spells of wishing to get away from her. The father was more in the background than ever during the summer. Once in a while he would show up on a week-day evening very tired, and leave again with the first morning boat. During the week-end he wanted above all to rest, and Keith was partly happy and partly unhappy at being left alone.

Once only during that summer did his father appear under circumstances that impressed themselves on the boy's memory. It was the day of the annual regatta

of the Yacht Club. When the races were over, the yachts were towed back to the city by a large steamer, escorted by a whole flotilla of every kind of craft loaded with sightseers. It was the gala evening of the season. As the tender twilight of the August night descended on the smooth waters of the Lake Maelaren, every villa along the shores became brightly illuminated, while the progress of the fleet was marked by incessant bursts of fireworks.

The Wellanders had a splendid view from the little platform on which their cottage stood. Some friends had been invited for the day, and the father had brought with him from the city a package of fireworks. But instead of wasting money on sky-rockets or other expensive pieces, he had concentrated almost wholly on blue and red lights, which he placed among the trees all over the plateau and set off in batches, first one colour and then the other. Because the place was so high up, apart from the rest, and so heavily wooded, the effect was probably very pretty from the water. Anyhow, a burst of applause was heard from the passing flotilla.

"That's for us," said Keith's father, "and not for those rich people down by the shore."

As usual when very much pleased, he laughed while speaking so that it was hard to hear what he said. But Keith heard, and a glow of pride swelled his chest. It was the crowning climax of a scene that touched the boy with a sense of joy bordering on pain. "Beautiful" was a word used repeatedly by the grown-up people about him. He knew now that beauty was something that turned ordinary life into a pleasure more

keen than could be had out of eating, or playing, or reading, or getting presents at Christmas even. To this wonderful thing his father had added a personal triumph in which the whole family participated. It silenced incipient criticism for a long time.

Nevertheless there was another side to that self-satisfied remark of his father, and it also stuck in his memory. Back of the proud words lay envy and deference, and a suggestion of hopeless separation. In Keith's mind it became tied up with his memories from Loth's party, and all of it formed a complex of thought from which he tried his best to get away—and most of the time successfully.

XIV

FOR lack of sufficient accommodations in the overcrowded old building, one class had to use the assembly hall. To make the many disadvantages more palatable, this location was presented as an honour reserved for the class shepherded by the old Rector himself. Of this "honour" Keith became a participant when the fall term opened.

There were no desks—only benches without backs. The rest of the school left with a sense of relief after using them only during the fifteen minutes of morning prayer. To sit on them hours at a stretch turned the day into torture before it was half done. The only way of resting was to bend far forward with humped

back, and no sooner did the Rector discover a boy in that position than he descended on the sinner:

"Straight in the back, boy! What do you think you are—an old hag sorting rags?"

No attempt was made to arrange the boys according to merit. On the first day every one chose a seat to suit himself, and so Keith found himself number five without knowing how it had happened. Number four was a boy of his own size and age named George Murray, who seemed to be as friendless as was Keith.

Instead of one teacher, they had a dozen at least, few of whom gave instruction in more than a single subject. It smacked of university and made the boys feel very much advanced. The curriculum showed an imposing array of new subjects—Latin, French, universal history, physics, chemistry, and so on. Their novelty caught and carried Keith for a good while.

Latin was still the most important study of all. It was taught by the Rector himself, who worshipped everything classic with a religious devotion and who maintained in so many words that a man's culture was measured by his mastery of the Roman tongue. In the lower grades it had been spoken of with bated breath. Keith had looked forward to the first lesson with trembling impatience. He plunged into the declination of *mensa* with the fervour of a convert. He translated the text-book's *colomba est timida* with a sense of performing a sacred rite. Days went by before he dared to admit to himself that his interest was waning.

Even then he went on studying without a thought of rebellion. The habit of application had become deeply rooted. The pride born out of his first easy successes still urged him to master any subject offered. But

there was a change in his manner of studying as well as in his general attitude toward the school. Until then he had been an acolyte in sacred precincts. Now he turned gradually into a time-server doing his duty out of vanity and a desire to remain a public school pupil. Until then he had never felt that he had to study. Now fear of the old Rector and of his father entered more and more as conscious motives.

He missed the kind guidance of Dally. The Rector never became the soul and guardian of the class in the manner of Dally. The other teachers came and went without other interest than to insure a decent showing in their respective subjects. All had favourites chosen from those pupils who showed most aptitude for mathematics, natural history or whatever it happened to be. No one was interested in the class as a whole, and no one cared for its individual members as human beings in the make. Within a short time Keith was simply drifting, although neither he nor those appointed to guide him were aware of it at the time.

XV

KEITH took a liking to George Murray from the start. During the first couple of days he looked at him frequently as if to invite acquaintance, but the other boy always appeared deeply attentive to the subject of the hour. During the pauses he withdrew into a corner as if to forestall possible advances. At the end of the second day Keith and

Murray reached the stairway simultaneously and started for the street side by side. Murray's pale, aristocratic and very narrow face with unduly prominent teeth still bore a look of indifference, but his attitude had lost a little of its previous stiffness.

"Where do you live," Keith ventured with for him rare forwardness.

"On the Quay," replied Murray in a voice that neither encouraged nor discouraged.

"Where," asked Keith eagerly.

"Corner of St. John's Lane."

"That's my corner," cried Keith. "I live in the lane, and we have the same way home."

"All right," was Murray's only answer, which Keith accepted in the affirmative.

Little more was said until they reached the top of the hill above Carl Johan Square, when Keith explained that he always kept to the left along the shore of Lake Maelaren.

"I always take the other way," rejoined Murray, suiting his actions to his words.

"All right," said Keith in his turn, going along toward the saltwater side of the harbour as if it had been the route of his own choice. They stopped for a moment to watch the sloops in the fish market loaded almost to the point of foundering with live fish. Further out a number of large sailing vessels rode at anchor. Still further away, where the southern shore drew close to the point of the island with the turreted red fort, a big black steamer was seen slowly creeping toward its landing place at the Quay. For a moment Murray studied it intently, shading his eyes in sailor fashion to see better.

"That's one of our steamers," he said at last.

"Do you mean you own it," gasped Keith incredulously.

"The company does," explained Murray.

"Which company?"

"The one of which my father is managing director."

"Are there many of them," Keith asked to be polite. It sounded too much like a fairy tale.

"Seven," replied Murray casually. "They are all painted black and sail on foreign ports."

"Did you ever travel on one," inquired Keith with something like awe in his voice.

"Yes," said the slim youngster by his side as if it had been the most natural thing in the world. "Many times, as far as the pilot station, with papa. And last summer he took me along on a real journey to England. That's where our family comes from, and we were gone three whole weeks."

"Were you scared," Keith asked almost in a whisper.

"No." Murray shook his head with quick assurance. "That is, not much. We had a storm in the North Sea coming back, but papa said it was nothing to be afraid of, and for a while I was too sick to care."

"Sick!" Keith echoed. "And were you not awfully scared?"

"No," Murray insisted, looking rather pleased. "Not much."

Keith was too overwhelmed to ask more questions just then. The rest of the way home was traversed in silence. At the corner of the lane they parted with a mutual nod. Then Keith bolted up the lane and up the three flights of stairs. Entering the kitchen

breathlessly, he yelled out with his cap still on his head:

"I walked home with Murray who lives at the corner and whose papa owns seven ships and who sits next to me in the class."

"Little boys should be civil," suggested Granny with a glance at the cap. "And they should also remember that equals make the best playmates, and that all is not gold that glistens."

"Oh, he's my equal," Keith declared triumphantly.

"With plenty to spare," retorted Granny. "But are you his?"

It made Keith walk home alone the next day, and as he shuffled along listlessly, the almost obliterated memory of Harald came back to him.

XVI

THE attraction had been established, however—on one side at least—and it would not let itself be smothered. Nor did Keith make any strong effort in that direction. It was not his way. He found it as hard to abstain from what gave him pleasure for the moment as to bear whatever seemed unpleasant or painful.

Murray made no approaches of any kind, but he did not resist. His acceptance of Keith's friendship was purely passive, and there was always a limit to it. At first they simply walked home together from school. Of course, they sat side by side during the lessons, but Murray gave his whole attention to the teacher or

to his book. If Keith tried to whisper to him, Murray merely frowned at him. During the pauses they were often together, chatting or playing, but it could also happen that Murray chose to mix with some group of fellow pupils in such a manner that Keith could not get near to him. Sometimes Keith would then also join them. More often he would hover on the outskirts in a state of utter misery.

Even when the school closed for the day, it depended entirely on Keith if they were to have company home. Murray never waited. If Keith was not in sight when he reached the street, he went right on. Several times Keith had to run several blocks to overtake his friend.

"Why couldn't you wait a minute for me," he asked when he had recovered his breath after one of those pursuits.

"Oh, that's so silly," was Murray's only reply, and a repetition of the question on two or three subsequent occasions brought no more satisfactory response. Keith did not press the matter beyond that point and uttered no protest at Murray's real or assumed indifference.

Until then Keith had always taken East Long Street on his way to school in the morning. Now he turned invariably down the lane to the Quay. On reaching the corner, he took a long look at the corner house where Murray lived. Two mornings he saw no one and walked on. The third morning Murray happened to appear just as Keith reached the corner. After that Keith waited for his friend, and they walked together to as well as from school. Having waited very long one morning and fearing that his friend had

passed already, Keith ventured into the house, when he caught sight of Murray coming out of a door reached by a little spur of the main stairway.

"Is that where you live," asked Keith.

"That's the kitchen door," said Murray. "Our main entrance is in front on the landing above. It's quicker for me to get out this way in the morning, and I don't have to disturb anybody."

A few mornings later, Murray was late again, and Keith after long hesitation walked up to the kitchen door and knocked. A pleasant-faced serving girl opened.

"Oh, you are the little fellow who waits for George every morning," she said with a smile. "Come in and wait here. He'll be ready in a moment."

After that Keith went straight up to the kitchen every morning. It was a room as large as a hall, shiningly clean, and well furnished as a dining and living-room for the three women serving there. Keith became quite familiar with it, but he always remained by the door, and he always felt that he ought not to be there. Yet he could no more resist going there than he could stop breathing, it seemed.

That kitchen was the only part of Murray's home he ever saw. He never caught a glimpse even of his friend's mother, who evidently was a very exclusive lady. Two or three times he saw Murray on the street after school hours in company with a tall, portly and handsome gentleman, whom he took to be the father. Later his guess was confirmed, but Murray never showed any inclination to let his parents become aware of Keith's existence.

For a long while this did not matter to Keith. In

fact, he was not aware of anything but his own devo tion. Murray's willingness to accept it only whe nothing else was in sight did not bother him. He ha found some one to worship at last, and he gave him self to that feeling with an abandon that knew of n reserves and that asked no questions. He looked u to the other boy as, in ages long gone by, a faithfu vassal used to look up to his liege lord. And it seeme only meet that such a superior being as Murray shoul bestow or withhold his favour in accordance with hi own sweet pleasure.

XVII

KEITH had just parted from his chum at the cor ner of the lane one afternoon, when he caugh sight of Johan near the big back door of th house opposite the one where Murray lived.

"What are you doing," he said without much en thusiasm.

Johan beckoned mysteriously and would not say word until he had got Keith into the shadow of th huge gateway leading to the paved yard in the rear o the house.

"Can't you come on," he cried impatiently at las "I don't want mumsey to see me."

When both were hidden from the kitchen windo through which Fru Gustafsson used to keep a rel giously preoccupied eye on the doings of her son, Joha

pulled a cigarette from within his coat sleeve and a match from his pocket. Then he scratched the match on the seat of his pants and lit the cigarette with the air of a man who knows what is bliss. Keith watched him with feelings too confused for expression.

"What would your mamma say if she saw you," he asked at last, instinctively dropping his voice to a whisper.

"She'd tell popsey," Johan rejoined promptly, "and I'd get another licking. But it's worth it."

There was a long pause during which Keith watched his old playmate's unmistakable enjoyment with a mixture of consternation and admiration, of envy and resentment.

"I have got another," said Johan after a while. "Try it."

Keith shook his head. He was on the verge of saying that "mamma won't let me," but checked himself in time as he recalled the results of an earlier use of that too truthful explanation.

"Murray wouldn't smoke," he ventured after another pause.

"Him up there, you mean," inquired Johan with a gesture of his thumb toward the house across the lane. "Of course, he wouldn't. He's a miss."

"He is not," Keith cried passionately.

"And he's a stiff, too," Johan went on without any particular display of feeling. "And you're a fool, that's all."

There was a coolness between them.

"I think mamma is waiting for me," remarked Keith as he started to walk off.

"Of course she is waiting for her baby," Johan retorted with a leer.

Keith stopped and thought. Murray would fight for a thing like that, he said to himself. Or would he? Without having reached a decision Keith made for his own house, trying to look as if Johan didn't exist.

"He has no real use for you, and you'll find it out," was Johan's parting shot.

Keith was suddenly struck with the coarseness of Johan's manners and speech. He was making comparisons in his mind, and as a result the image of Murray seemed more resplendent than ever.

XVIII

"DID you ever try to smoke," he asked Murray next morning.

"No," was the disdainful reply. "I know papa wouldn't like it, and it's nasty anyhow."

"How do you know," wondered Keith.

"Because I know," rejoined Murray. It was a way he had, and it always settled the matter. A cold, tired look would appear on his face if Keith tried to press a subject after such an answer, and before that look Keith quailed.

His state was hopeless. He accepted as law whatever his friend said or did. And although their friendship, such as it was, lasted only two years, Keith did

not take up smoking until he was in camp as a conscript at the age of twenty.

In school it was the same. And the fact that Murray attended to his studies with scrupulous exactness was probably one of the factors that helped Keith through the grade without any loss of standing as a scholar.

Like Loth, Murray had mildly artistic leanings, and because he liked to draw and to sing, Keith, too, had to join in those studies, although both were elective, and although the singing classes twice a week consumed one of the two precious lunch hours that otherwise could be used so profitably for play or study. Keith had neither aptitude nor interest for draftsmanship, being curiously set toward the written word. He would have liked to sing well, as he had noticed that boys having a good voice were always popular and received a lot of flattering attention. But his ear was so poor that for a while it looked as if he would not even be admitted to the singing practices. His persistence prevailed in the end, and when he and Murray stood side by side, using the same song-book while practicing some brave old student song, he felt as much happiness as ever fell to his share in those days.

They had common hours in gymnastics, too, but they were compulsory three times a week, and Murray took them as a duty rather than a pleasure. Keith liked them on the whole, and unlike most of the other boys, he preferred the slow routine of the setting-up exercises to the more athletic features. While he never consciously realized the cause of that preference

at the time, it would not have been difficult for a fairly intelligent observer to discover it.

Keith was still one of the smallest boys in the school utterly lacking any physical superiority, although he was in excellent health and never had experienced a single one of the ailments that commonly dodge the steps of childhood. He could not shine in jumping or leaping or climbing, but in the drill his painstaking attention placed him on a par with everybody else. It was his one chance of feeling himself the physical equal of his schoolmates, and it was the only field of common endeavour outside the lessons where he was not made to feel his own inferiority.

XIX

THE insufficiency of one room as a living place for three persons had long been evident. Keith was in his twelfth year, and he still slept on the chaiselongue opposite his father's and mother's bed. He had ceased to pretend that the corner between the window and his mother's bureau could possibly be considered a satisfactory "play-room." Then a tenant who had lived with them quite a while left and the parlour became unexpectedly vacant. Keith revelled in the free use of it, and his mother talked seriously of not renting it again, but the father insisted that they could not afford to keep it for themselves.

Then Keith's mother had a bright idea. She inserted an advertisement offering a home and "as good

as parental care" to a boy from the country for the school season. An answer was received, negotiations progressed favourably, and soon Albert Mendelius, the son of a minister, was installed in the parlour with the understanding that his use of it was exclusive only at night. In the daytime it was common ground for both boys, and Keith did his studying in there, but he continued to sleep on the chaiselongue.

The boys got on very well together, and yet no real friendship sprang up between them. Albert, who attended a different school, had his own associates, and Keith could not take much of his mind off Murray. It made a great improvement in Keith's living conditions, however, and he hoped it would last.

When Albert went home to celebrate Christmas, Keith was asked to pay him a visit after the holidays. This invitation became still more attractive when Keith received a fine pair of skates for a Christmas present. He had never seen the country in winter, and the impression it made on him was a little startling. The sight of the dark pines against the white carpet of the snow filled him with a mystic longing so strong that it almost frightened him. When he and Albert put on their skates and stretched out at full speed across the lake that spread its floor of dark glass within a stone's throw of the vicarage, he had a sense of never having lived before. The spaciousness of the house and the pleasant evenings spent cracking nuts and eating apples in front of the blazing fire-place were also revelations that filled his mind with many new thoughts. Why was his own home not like this?

The boys went back to Stockholm together, but before they started, Keith learned that Albert was

going elsewhere to live. An aunt of his had offer to take him in for the rest of the season.

"And, of course," said Albert's mother apologe cally, "when you can be with your own kin, it is bett you know."

Keith wondered a little. On his return home, mother said indignantly that she supposed their humb home had not been found good enough. A few wee later the parlour was rented in the old way to a gent looking young man with very pink cheeks who cough a good deal.

And Keith once more found himself restricted to t living-room for all the time spent at home.

XX

KEITH had been home for lunch and was on h way back to the school. He was alone. Mu ray was in bed with some slight ailment.

It was in January, a cold but brilliant day. T streets were covered with deep snow. Everythi that usually moved on wheels was now on runners. runners make no noise and the sound of the hoofs w deadened by the snow, every horse carried a bell, a some of them had a whole little chime. The brig sunlight on the white snow and the tinkling of those bells made a stimulating combination, and peo hurried along with smiling faces, although they had rub their noses and cheeks frequently to keep th from freezing.

Keith was never sensitive about his face, but his hands were buried deeply in his coat pockets. His schoolbooks were tied up in a leather thong and slung over his shoulder like a knapsack.

At the Sluice he stopped and looked long at the people skating merrily on the rinks down on the ice of the lake between the Corn Harbour and the railway bridge. A number of boys near his own age were among the rest having a good time. Many of the boys brought their skates to school and never went home for lunch, but just ate a couple of sandwiches in order to spend as much as possible of the noonday pause on the ice. Keith had asked permission to do the same, but the refusal had been peremptory. The fact was that he was granted little or no chance to use his new skates. Once in a while he got leave, after begging long and hard, to run over to the rinks at the New Bridge Harbour, in the North End, for a brief while in the late afternoon. Most of the time even that scant leave was denied him. To his mother's general disinclination to let him out of sight was added her dread that he might fall into the water and get drowned. He promised by everything sacred that he would not leave the rink, which she ought to know was perfectly safe, but her morbid fears would not listen to reason. More and more he was beginning to give up asking even. The disappointment of a refusal was too bitter to be borne often.

As he stood leaning against the bridge railings, his eyes strayed farther and farther along the surface of the lake, which lay frozen as far out as he could see. There were rinks on the other side of the railway bridge, too, and here and there he noticed isolated

black figures gliding along the unswept spaces outsi
the rinks. Suddenly he caught sight of a large gath
ing of people very far out. They were moving slow
toward the shore, and evidently they were held t
gether by some common purpose. He wondered wh
they could be doing out there, far beyond the last rink
but the distance was too great to give him any ba
for speculation.

After a while he had to leave in order not to be la
He had almost reached the school when he was ov
taken by a boy from the English section of his ov
grade, about whom he knew nothing but that his nam
was Bergman.

"Have you heard," cried Bergman when he w
still several steps behind, although he and Keith ha
never exchanged a word before. Keith turned
surprise.

"Three boys were drowned skating during the lun
hours," continued Bergman breathlessly. "Two we
in my class—Hill and Samson, you know. The thir
Dahlin, was in your own class."

"Is Dahlin dead?" asked Keith blankly. The thi
seemed impossible to him. He had been talking
Dahlin that very morning—a tall boy, slow, sel
possessed, older than most of the other pupils, and a
vanced for his age in everything but studies.

"He is," said Bergman with emphasis. "And so a
the other two. They are dragging for the bodi
now."

So that was what I saw those people doing out ther
Keith thought.

"Little Moses was with them," Bergman ran o
"The Jew, you know. We've always thought him

coward. And he nearly went down, too, trying to save them."

By that time they were separating at the door to Bergman's classroom. On entering his own class, Keith found it in a state of unexampled though subdued excitement. The boys were gathered in groups which constantly shifted membership. Every one spoke in a whisper. Reports and rumours of the most fantastic kind passed from group to group, giving rise to fierce discussions. Six boys had been drowned instead of three, some one asserted. In another minute they heard that no one had been lost. Most credence was given to a circumstantial report of the miraculous recovery of Dahlin after he had been fully fifteen minutes under water. His big sealskin cap, they said, had become stuck over his face as he went under, so that the water could not choke him.

Keith was among the most excited for a while, running eagerly from group to group and telling what he had heard from Bergman, who evidently had the very latest news. Soon, however, his mood changed, and he retired quickly to his own seat. There he sat by himself, his elbows on his knees and his face resting in his hands. A stupor had descended on his mind. The whole thing seemed so incredible. He could not grasp it. Those boys, who had been right among them only a few hours ago, would never appear again. There would be a funeral, and then they would never be heard of again. Tears broke into his eyes. He choked with a vague sense of pity. Samson, he knew, was the only son of a poor widow. Hill's mother was very sick, some one had said. And Dahlin. . . .

Keith instinctively raised his head to look at the

place which Dahlin had occupied that very mornin
What did it mean . . . ?

At that moment the Rector entered, long overdue,
give them an hour in Latin—an hour of which a gooc
part already was gone. The boys dropped into th
seats. A murmur of expectation passed through t
class. Every eye was on the Rector's face whi
seemed to twitch in a peculiar fashion.

"The school has suffered a terrible loss," he said
last, his voice sounding very hoarse. "There is on
one thing we can do—work! Will *primus* please beg
translating from the top of the twenty-second pag
where we left off yesterday."

The boys stared at him, but no one dared to spea
They knew there was no escape, and they tried to
their attention on the books. Keith saw before him
blurred page full of dancing letters. *Primus* stumbl
and blundered. He was followed by *secundus* and *te*
tius. Keith had recovered a little by that time, and
knew they were making mistakes that ordinarily wou
have called forth a storm of reproof from the Rect
Now he paid no attention, but merely repeated:

"Go on—go on!"

At last the lesson came to an end, and then they we
dismissed for the day.

On his way home Keith's thoughts ran in a fut
circle around the day's event. If they had never le
the rink . . . if they had been saved . . . if the sto
about Dahlin could have been true. . . .

Always his thoughts returned to the same point: t
strangeness of the fact that those boys would nev
appear again. At no moment, however, did it occ
to him that the same thing might have happened

himself—or might happen some time in the future. He was Keith Wellander, to whom such things never happened.

He was nearly home when he suddenly stopped in the middle of East Long Street and said to himself:

"Now I suppose I'll *never* get leave to go skating again."

XXI

AMONG other new duties that accompanied Keith's entrance into the fourth grade was church-going. Until then he had known little about public worship beyond what he observed during two or three attendances of Yule Matins, that was almost like going to a party. The rule of the school was that all pupils in the higher grades who were not going to church with their parents elsewhere must attend services with their respective classes every other Sunday at the Church of St. Mary Magdalene.

Judging by the number of boys who turned up, the percentage of church-goers among the parents must have been very small. Keith's father went to communion once a year. That was all. The mother went a little oftener, but as a rule something else turned up about the time she ought to start, and so she stayed home and read a chapter in some Lutheran postil instead. Keith thought little of that kind of books. He had tried them and found them dull beyond endurance.

"Do you really like reading that stuff," he said to mother one Sunday.

"Keith!" she protested sternly. Then she continu more mildly: "It is not a question of like or disli my boy, but of saving your soul by humbling it bef the Lord."

"Can you do that by reading," asked Keith in cently.

"N-no . . . not exactly," his mother hesitat "But you can. . . . Oh, I know I ought to be church instead of sitting here, but I am such a we vessel, and I am sure that the Lord will understand a forgive me."

"Well, then you don't need to worry, mamma," s Keith consolingly, stirred as always by the appearar of an emotional note in her voice.

"We should always worry," she rejoined very gent "because we are all sinners and we have a chance o by His mercy. But I don't believe in a hell, whatev they say, and I don't want you, Keith, to pay any att tion to anything of that kind they may teach you."

"But why do they teach it then," asked Keith, logic alert.

"Because . . . it's a long story, and you will und stand it some day. Now I want to finish my chapt or I won't be able to do so before dinner is ready."

Keith would have liked to ask more, but what c cerned him was the apparent contradiction in h mother's words rather than the subject of religion self. His main impression of religion so far was th it was something very tedious to which grown-up p ple submitted for some mysterious reason never rea revealed to children. And this impression was ab

dantly confirmed by his subsequent experiences in the prudishly ugly precincts of St. Mary Magdalene.

Seats were reserved in one of the side galleries for the pupils from Old Mary. Two teachers sat in one of the front pews, so that they could look down into the church. Aspiring youngsters who wanted to make sure of good marks were apt to look upon the same pews with special favour. The rest of the boys wanted to sit as far back as possible, where they could whisper, and show each other pictures, and eat candy without too much danger of being discovered. These pursuits brought no relief to Keith, partly because he possessed neither pictures nor candy, being always very shy of pocket money, and partly because either fear or some sort of pride made him draw back from engaging in any sort of mischief behind the teacher's back.

The hymn singing was not without a certain enjoyment. The slowness of the tempo made it possible for Keith to keep in tune by leaning very close to the boy sitting next to him. Even the reading of the gospels and other recurring features of the service could be borne. But when the sermon began, Keith fell into sheer agony. The other boys seemed capable of letting the words of the preacher drop off them as water drops off the oily feathers of a water-fowl. But one of Keith's characteristics was that he had to listen to anything said loudly enough in his presence. For him there was no escape. Through an endless hour, that sometimes would verge on the five quarters, he had to sit there and take in every word of a long-winded, moralistic discourse dealing in forbidding terms with things that left his brain as untouched as if they had

been uttered in a strange tongue. He had a sense
warnings and threats that seemed to connect with wh
his mother had asked him not to heed. He was t
to believe, but he could not make out what it was
should believe—unless it was the Small Catechism, a
that had always left his mind a perfect blank althou
he knew it by heart from the first page to the last.

When at last the ordeal was over, he rushed aw
with a sense of relief that was marred by the thoug
of the same thing happening two weeks later. It w
the only feature of his schooling that left behind
actual sense of grievance which the passing years co
not mollify.

XXII

A LITTLE before commencement the wh
school was stirred by important news.
reorganization of the entire school system w
in progress, and one result of it was the merger of t
old *gymnasium* or high school on Knight's Island w
Old Mary and the expansion of the latter to nine grad
under the new name of St. Mary's Higher La
School. A building across the street had already be
acquired for the four new grades, and a new rector
higher rank was to take charge in the fall.

"It means that we'll stay right here until we go
the university," one of Keith's classmates explained
a tone implying that it must make quite a difference
their lives. Then he asked suddenly: "You'll go

to the university, Wellander, won't you—you with your brilliant mind?"

Keith looked at him in dumb astonishment. In spite of his two prizes, it was so strange to be called brilliant. And then the question of going to the university had been raised. Until then he had really never given a thought to it. And the question of cost leaped into his mind. He was beginning to learn at last that money was needed for a number of things you liked to do. Would it cost much, and could his father afford to pay that much, and, most important of all, would his father consent to pay it? Those were novel questions—and as he did so often when faced by something unpleasant or disturbing, so, now again, he pushed them aside, fled from them, refused to have anything to do with them. There were still five grades between him and that threateningly attractive possibility, the student's white cap.

"I don't know," he said at last, being a truthful fool in most matters, "I have not asked papa yet."

And there was a smile on the other boy's face which Keith disliked without guessing the significance of it.

Commencement brought him a prize again—a German dictionary just like the one Krass got when Keith carried off the highest prize in school after thinking himself ignominiously passed by. Of course, a prize was a prize, but—and he thought his father looked rather disappointed when he heard of it.

However, George Murray also received a book, and it was no better than Keith's, although Murray professed to see a great difference between a German Dictionary and a Latin Classic.

XXIII

MURRAY was going off with his family to the private summer residence in the archipela outside of Stockholm and Keith gather that it must be a very magnificent place. The Wellan ers didn't go to the country at all. Keith's mother h a very bad period again, full of worry and depressio The summer dragged along joylessly, and Keith had fall back on Johan's company in so far as he could o tain it. But Johan was getting very independent. H had plenty of other acquaintances, and what Keith sa of them made him deem it wiser not to mention the at all to his mother. He was gradually learning d cretion of a kind.

He read a good deal, and he was beginning to ma unauthorized visits to his father's bookcase in t parlour. There he had discovered certain volumes one Jules Verne, and if he could only have plung freely into these, the summer might have proved qui bearable. One day when he could not get at the book and his mood was more than usually fretful, and h mother seemed at her lowest, she suddenly turned him and said in a strangely bitter tone:

"All I have to go through now is your fault, Keith

"Why," he asked dumbly, staring at her.

"Because when you came into the world you hurt m so much that I have never been well since."

"How," he demanded, and as he spoke an idea flashed through his mind that his mother might not be knowing what she said. Just how such a thing could happen was still a mystery to him, but what she said sounded so absurdly impossible.

At that moment her mood suddenly changed.

"There is one thing I have never told you. But for my being made so sick when you were born, you would have had a little brother, and you would not have been so lonesome, and perhaps everything would have been better. But he was born dead. And now I have no one but you, and I shall have no one else, and you are everything to me, and you must love me very much and never leave me."

Her arms were about him, and she was crying. And soon both felt better. But Keith had heard things he could not forget. And there was food in them for a summer's thought.

PART IV.

I

FROM the very start the fifth grade was a disappointment. Once Keith, like all the rest of the smaller boys, had looked up to it with awe-stricken yearnings as to a peak that only a few fortunate ones could hope to climb. It was then the top of the school. Its pupils were revered seniors—olympians tarrying momentarily among ordinary mortals before they took flight for the exalted regions where they really belonged. All this had been changed by the reorganization. The fifth grade now was merely a continuation of the fourth and a stepping stone to the sixth. And Keith's class was the first one to miss the honours of which successive generations had dreamed as far back as the school had existed. It was a thing no one had considered when the great news was passed round in the spring. Now it was brought home to those most nearly concerned with that poignancy of realization of which only youth is capable. It gave to the whole class a peculiar atmosphere as if it had been marked in advance for defeat. The teachers seemed to feel it, too, and especially the old Rector, who, after so many years of supreme command, suddenly found himself reduced to a subordinate position.

Keith felt robbed like the rest. And like them, he felt that the instruction had become a mere humdrum routine enabling a certain number of boys to get the

proper marks at the end of a certain number of months. What had lured him on as an adventure had turned into a tedious grind. And more and more he drifted back into a dream world of his own out of which he had been dragged by Dally's good-humoured jibes. And yet, what could he expect? Had not Dally even, his best friend in the whole school, cheated him of the honour he had rightfully earned—an honour that, once lost, could never be recovered?

The subjects, on the whole, were the same as in the previous grade. You simply went further into them—that was all. The teachers were the same, and the relationships once established between them and the boys remained the same, for good or bad. Every one knew what to expect, on both sides, and no one quite escaped from the resulting sense of staleness.

The old Rector went on cramming the class with Latin grammar. He had a way of making some poor stumbler conjugate the same verb fifteen to twenty times in succession, so that the correct sequence might never again escape his memory. And as the red-faced sinner stammered out the tenses, the Rector would make a tube of his left hand into which he poked his right thumb. This gesture was always accompanied by the same mocking remark:

"That's the way to stuff sausages!"

His language grew more picturesque and unrestrained every day. He belonged distinctly to an older and less circumspect generation, and he was a good deal of an eccentric besides. His heart was of gold and no one ever took the pedagogue's mission more seriously, but whatever he possessed of refinement went into his appreciation of the language that was his life's

passion. When he spoke Swedish, he called a spade a spade in a manner that gave Keith shock after shock. Always rather given to a certain aristocratic exclusiveness in his speech, Keith had through his association with Murray become something of a prude in this respect. He could still descend to obscenities when his "manliness" had to be proved, but vulgarity repelled him irresistibly.

Until then he had never dreamt of questioning any authority. Even at this juncture he obeyed directions explicity and maintained on the whole his reputation as a good pupil. But a tendency to criticism was growing within him, and from the men who taught him it began gradually to pass to the subjects taught. There came a day when the truth could no longer be evaded: he was bored most of the time. And the result was that he grew more and more listless.

If asked, Keith could not have told what was wrong. In fact, it is not at all certain that he would have admitted that anything was wrong. No rebellious stirrings had yet found tangible form within him.

He had to learn long lists of foreign kings that had been dead for ages. He was even expected to know when each king ascended his throne and left it. He had to learn mathematic formulas and grammatic rules. And on the heels of each rule hung at least a dozen exceptions. It was impossible to tell which were of greater importance, the rules or the exceptions. He had also to learn the exact number of pistils and stamens possessed by every flower likely to be found in the vicinity of the Swedish capital. The same thing happened in every subject embraced by the curriculum. There was no end to it. Yet he did not rebel. Every

one knew that there was no other way of teachin
things, so what was the use of rebelling?

His memory was good, although tricky. In a cas
of aroused interest he could absorb an astonishing num
ber of dates, or figures, or lines of poetry, at firs
glance or hearing. But he could also drop them as i
he had never heard of them the moment his interes
was gone. And they always seemed to drop out o
sight when he left school and returned home. Tha
word interest seemed to give the key to the situation
And all sorts of vague and queer and inexplicabl
things within himself determined whether he was to b
interested or not. It was not a question of choice o
will. He was or was not.

Facts as facts did not interest him at all. Eve
things as things did not necessarily, though they might
The class made excursions into the fields and wood
framing the capital, and under the guidance of thei
teacher of botany they observed and analysed all sort
of living flowers. Keith was delighted to get out an
charmed with the flowers, but the facts about the
pointed out by the teacher left him profoundly un
moved. They had exciting little experiments in chem
istry, and Keith effervesced with the rest, but nothin
of what he saw brought him more than a momentar
diversion.

All those things left his own real life untouched
And yet he was not merely looking for fairy tales an
adventures. His mind already was hungry for some
thing else. He found it often in the books he read a
home, many of which had been borrowed from th
school library. Not facts—but how different sorts o
facts hung together, so to speak. The school ought t

tell him, and sometimes he had an uneasy feeling that the teachers were trying to tell him this very thing. But they failed somehow, and the farther he advanced, the more exasperating that failure became.

He was in his thirteenth year, and he was no longer certain that he cared to study. But reading was still his dominant passion—reading and George Murray.

II

RELATIONS with Murray had been resumed on the old basis. Day after day they walked to and from school together, and hardly ever was their friendship disturbed by a misunderstanding. In school, too, they spent a good deal of time in each other's company, and they continued to sit side by side. Being so much seen together, they gradually came to be known as "the twins," which pleased Keith tremendously. But once they had parted for the day at the corner of the Quay and the lane, there was no more communication between them. And no matter what Keith said or did, he could never persuade his friend to break that rule.

Then Murray's birthday came along, and he told Keith quite casually that his mother had promised to let him have a party and invite five of his schoolmates.

"Will you ask me," Keith blurted out, his eyes shining with eagerness.

"I don't know," said Murray guardedly.

"But I am your best friend in school," Keith pro tested.

"It depends on mamma," Murray explained, and hi voice lacked a little of its customary complacency.

"Of course, I should like to have you," he adde after a pause, but his words carried no conviction.

Keith was too hard hit to say a word.

A couple of days later, on their way home fron school, Murray said unexpectedly that he and hi mother had looked over the school catalogue the nigh before, and that his mother had picked the five boy whom he was to invite. And he started to name them The first name was that of Brockert, a boy in their ow class.

"But I have never seen you speak to him," Keith in terrupted him.

"He is a very fine boy and comes of excellent fam ily," Murray retorted. Then he enumerated the othe four. Only one of them besides Brockert belonged t their own class.

Little as Keith knew about most of the boys in schoo he realized that all the prospective guests had thre things in common: they were good scholars, poor, an yet of good families. One had a *von* in front of hi name. Brockert, too, had some sort of claim to no bility, although it was said that his mother earned living for herself and him by working as a seamstres and the boy was known to pay for his own tuition b tutoring backward sons of rich families in the lowe grades.

Keith tried to look unconcerned. Fortunately the were near home, and soon he could get away by himsel It has to be admitted that he cried. And in the end h

told his mother, who tried to make him promise never to speak to Murray again.

"But we're side partners in the class," said Keith, still sobbing.

There was a certain stiffness between him and Murray during the next few days, but they kept company to and from school as usual. Not until the morning after the party did it occur to Keith that his pride demanded some kind of demonstration.

That morning he meant to keep away from his friend. He stayed at home longer than usual on purpose. Finally he grew afraid of being late and tumbled pell-mell downstairs, intent on turning to his old route by way of East Long Street. But no sooner had he reached the lane than his legs seemed to be moving regardless of his will, and they took the familiar turn toward the Quay. At that moment he caught sight of Murray crossing the mouth of the lane without looking either right or left. Something like a shiver passed through Keith's body, but his legs were still in command, and they began to run. A minute later he was walking beside Murray as he had done day after day for the better part of three terms.

At first they did not speak. Then Murray began to tell about the party of the night before as if it had been the most natural thing in the world to do so. He told what they had eaten and what they had played and what impression the boys had made on his mother. Keith listened without a word.

The worst fight he had ever fought with himself was raging within him, and while he heard every word that Murray uttered, they seemed to pass him by as if spoken to some other person. His heart was beating

very hard, and he breathed uneasily. An unfamiliar impersonal voice within himself was telling him that he must either give Murray a good licking then and there or run away. Nasty, ugly, hateful words seemed to crowd to his lips with an all but irresistible demand for utterance.

Yet he walked on as before, listening to Murray without a word of comment. At last, when they were near the school entrance, he stopped suddenly and said:

"Did you ever speak to your mother of me?"

"I did," replied Murray calmly. "And she said that while she had no objection to our keeping company, she did not think your father's position was such that we could ask you home."

A strange thing happened to Keith at that moment. It seemed to him that everything had been satisfactorily explained, and that there was no reason why he should be angry with Murray or offended at his friend's parents. He had simply been made to suffer for something that had nothing to do with his own person.

"Hey, twins," a classmate yelled at them just then.

"I suppose you couldn't help it," Keith said weakly to Murray.

"I really should have liked to have you," Murray answered, and it made Keith feel as if he had been more than compensated for his previous sufferings.

After that their friendship continued outwardly as before, but there was a difference. A tendency to nag and find fault appeared on both sides, and on several occasions they broke into actual quarrels. These al-

ways ended in reconcilations, but the old serenity had gone from their companionship, and each new misunderstanding left Keith a little more unhappy.

III

AS a result of the changed relationship between himself and the friend he idealized, Keith began once more to look up Johan. He did it rather furtively, as if he had known that he was engaged in something unworthy of himself. There was an additional reason for this return to an association long spurned, and it had something to do with his manner of going about it.

What his mother had told him during the summer was still fermenting in his mind, but no amount of brooding over it would produce any results. It was like trying to raise oneself by pulling at one's own bootstraps. He must turn to some one else for the information that alone could solve the mystery. Murray was out of the question. Keith had never exchanged a word with him about the subject that was taking more and more of his attention. He knew what Murray would say if such a matter were broached:

"I don't think my papa would like me to talk of it, and it's rather nasty anyhow."

No, Johan was the person to seek for knowledge of this kind. He was now smoking all the time when not under the eye of his mother. While Keith almost

had stood still physically, Johan had forged ahead There was no denying that he was coarse and dull an awkward, but there was a shrewd gleam in his some what bleary eyes, and from time to time he threw ou dark hints about enjoyments and experiences that littl boys clinging to their mother's skirts could neve master.

It became a sort of game between them—a gam that pleased Johan and drove Keith to exasperatio It was a game of hide-and-seek. And the most remark able feature of it was that, although Keith was dyin to know, he found it impossible to ask any direct que tions. His pose was that he didn't care, and Johan counter-pose was that he didn't know what Keith wa driving at.

Little by little, however, Keith extracted variou stories about those new friends of Johan's, who live in one of the neighbouring lanes and who had a big va cant attic at their disposal. There quite a number o boys gathered daily, and Johan did his best to impre Keith with the desperate character of their doing Girls came to that meeting-place, too. It was the pri cipal thing, according to Johan—the fact that mad those exploits so deliciously reprehensible. One da Johan was in an unusually communicative mood.

"Yesterday," he related with great gusto, "Nils g hold of Ellen and kissed her. And then they crawle into a big empty box when they thought we didn't s them. And there they stayed ever so long. B Gustaf crawled up behind the box and peeped. An he saw what they did, and then he told us."

"What did they do," asked Keith tensely, forgettin his usual reserve.

"Oh, you know," replied Johan teasingly.

"I don't," said Keith stoutly, realizing that it was a dreadful admission of inferiority. "And I want you to tell me."

For a moment Johan hesitated. Then he shot at Keith a single word—a verb—that Keith had heard in the lane and among the longshoremen on the Quay. He knew that it was bad—the worst one of its kind. He knew also in a vague sort of way that it touched the very heart of the mystery he was trying to solve. And yet it left him just as ignorant as before.

The bald use of that word by Johan stunned him for a moment. Then his hot thirst for light brushed all other considerations aside, and he said almost pleadingly:

"Can't you tell me all about it?"

"Oh, everybody knows," said Johan, and his eyes began to wander shiftily as they always did when he found himself cornered.

"You don't know yourself," Keith taunted him, suddenly grown wise beyond his ordinary measure.

"Yes, I do," insisted Johan.

"Then tell—or I won't believe you."

"They did what your papa and mamma do nights," Johan shot back.

There was a long pause.

"They don't do anything," Keith said at last almost in a whisper, "except talk."

"You bet they do," asserted Johan, sure now of having triumphed.

And Keith went home without asking any more questions.

IV

A QUEER restlessness seized him and left him no peace. He swung abruptly from one extreme mood to another—from mad elation to paralyzing depression. He had a baffling sense of things happening within himself that were equally beyond control and explanation. He grew tired of sitting on those plain benches at school, with no support for the back, and still more tired of the Rector's incessant "sit up straight, boy." Sometimes when he read at home, he could not keep his eyes fixed on the book because his thoughts insisted on straying into all sorts of irrelevant fields. But no matter in what direction they started, circuitously they always found their way into the field of main preoccupation.

Although shocked at the time by what Johan had told him, it did not remain actively in his memory. On a few occasions he woke up during the night with an impression of having heard his mother call his father's name. When he raised his head from the pillow to listen, a breathless stillness prevailed in the room. Soon he went back to sleep, and afterwards he thought no more about it. Yet the very act of listening seemed to inflame his mind in some way.

The game learned back of the big rock had never become quite forgotten. Yet it had never meant very much to him, and during his association with Murray

he had thought less and less of it. Now it took new hold of him, in a much more imperative way, as if it had got a new meaning and a new lure. And it seemed to have some elusive but highly significant connection with the mystery that always puzzled and fretted his curiosity.

Once more he pressed Johan for an explanation of that reference to Keith's parents.

"That's the way children are made," Johan finally announced with a mien of having transmitted the ultimate wisdom of the ages.

Keith merely stared at him. That answer did not interest him at all. Of course, he had long guessed that the arrival of children was a part of the mystery, but it was a part that had ceased to concern him. What he wished to know, must know, related to himself exclusively. But in this respect there was nothing more to be had out of Johan.

At school he began to join a group of boys who always gathered in a corner of the assembly hall during the pauses instead of mixing with the mob in the schoolyard. The centre of that group was Swensson, a handsome young chap of more advanced age than the others who had spent two years in most of the grades. He was always behind in his studies, but he seemed to know more of life than all the rest put together. A large part of the time he was telling stories—always about girls—or relating adventures—always with girls. Keith found the stories amusing, but as a rule he failed to grasp their point. And yet they added fuel to the flame that was burning more and more hotly within him.

His mother had been watching him intently for some

time, and after a while she began to ask questions. These were guarded almost to unintelligibility, and yet Keith guessed that they referred to his own secret —the game learned back of the big rock. And so that game grew still more enticing. Even then, however, it did not seem to matter very much except in so far as it was the one thing that brought him a slight relief from the consuming restlessness of body and mind.

His mother's questions were followed by long talks, sometimes taking the form of warnings, but more often turning into passionate pleas. And gradually he gathered that the game he had been playing so innocently must be both sinful and dangerous. He tried as hard as he could to get to the root of his mother's hints, and he wanted to ask all sorts of questions. But in the end the meaning of her words seemed to dissolve into mist, and when he tried to question her directly, it was as if a solid wall had suddenly risen between them, so that neither one could hear what the other one said.

His father, too, began to ask questions, evidently urged on by the mother. He spoke sternly, but not unkindly, when he asked if Keith had been doing anything he ought not to do. And naturally enough Keith answered emphatically no.

In this way the mystery came closer and closer to him, and became more and more urgent. His mother's futile efforts at communicating what apparently rested heavily on her heart made him ill at ease, but he remained unconscious of any guilt or fear. A conflict of serious aspect and proportions was undoubtedly taking shape within him, but so far it was mainly concerned with the school and his friendship

for Murray and a general sense of dissatisfaction with the life he was leading. It was above all a sense of things missed.

Then he happened one afternoon, when his mother was out, to be delving with more than customary audacity among the books in his father's book case, which had become more accessible through the death of their gentle-looking tenant a short while before.

V

THE cough of Herr Stangenberg had been growing worse and worse all through the winter. He had to take to the bed more and more frequently. There had been a terrible change in his appearance. Only the eyes and his temper remained the same. He was always cheerful and hopeful. So he remained when he had to stay in bed entirely and a doctor began to pay him daily visits. Keith's mother did everything in her power to be of help, and it seemed to put her own troubles and worries more in the background.

"Consumption" was a word the parents often used in discussing the case of poor Herr Stangenberg, and Keith gathered that it was something dreadful and merciless, from which escape was impossible. His attitude toward the whole matter was peculiar. He listened to what his parents talked, but always in a spirit of utter indifference, as if what they said

could have no possible bearing on his own life.

One evening the servant girl—her name was Hilda at the time—brought word that Herr Stangenberg wanted very badly to see Fru Wellander for a few minutes.

"I think he knows at last that the end is near," Keith's mother said as she rose to go into the parlour. "What am I going to say if he asks me?"

"Nothing," replied the father quietly. "Leave that to the doctor."

On her return, the mother sank down in her chair and began to grope for a handkerchief. Keith saw that her eyes were lustrous with tears.

"What did he want?" asked the father with unusual anxiety.

"Well, if you tried for a month, you couldn't guess it," the mother said, and as she spoke, a smile broke through her tears. "It is so sad and so funny, that. . . . He wants me to send for his tailor to measure him for a new spring suit."

"Has he no idea . . . ?" The father checked himself with a glance at Keith.

"I know what you mean," said Keith calmly. Both parents looked at him in surprise, but neither comment nor rebuke ensued.

"No," the mother went on after a while, "he says that he knows he will be well and back at his office in two weeks. He actually laughed when I tried to say something about his being very ill. It brought on his cough again, and for a moment I thought he would die then and there. But when the attack was over, he asked me if I couldn't hear that the cough was much better. What do you think I ought to do?"

"Nothing," the father replied once more.

Keith was ready to start for school next morning when he heard Hilda utter a startled cry in the parlour.

"Fru Wellander! Fru Wellander!" she called.

Before the mother had a chance to move, the frightened face of the girl appeared in the parlour door, and she whispered as if afraid af waking some one out of sleep:

"He is dead."

Both women hurried into the parlour. Keith stood irresolute for a moment. Then he made for the kitchen door and ran down-stairs at top speed. He was afraid of missing Murray.

All during that day a thought would bother his brain like a buzzing fly: how peculiar that a man could want to order a new suit of clothes a few hours before he died. There was something irrational about it that stumped him. For a moment he thought of speaking to Murray about it, but it was as if some one had put a hand firmly over his mouth every time he tried to do so.

The funeral took place in a couple of days. A distant relative had turned up, very apologetic and eager to explain that his dead cousin had failed to let any one know that he was sick even. This young man, the minister, and Keith's parents were the only mourners. A single carriage sufficed.

Keith never went into the parlour during those days. When everything was nearly ready, the mother asked him if he cared to go in and have a last look at poor Herr Stangenberg before the lid was put on the coffin. Keith merely shook his head.

"You had better go," Granny called from th kitchen. "I never saw him better-looking while h was alive."

"I won't," Keith yelled back with an amount of i ritation that seemed quite out of proportion to it cause. The mother gave him an uneasy glance bu left the room without saying anything at the time.

As far as the boy was concerned, the incident wa closed. He had never permitted it to take a real hol of his mind, and he resented anybody's attempt t bring it closer to him. Death had stopped within hi own threshold, and he simply looked in the opposit direction. This attitude sprang mainly from som inner resistance so stubborn that it would not even per mit itself to be discussed. In addition, his mind wa engrossed with other things, and the principal signif icance it attached to the passing of a human life a such close quarters was the hope it held out that th parlour might remain vacant.

"Were you afraid to look," the mother asked Keit on her return with the father from the cemetery.

"No, I just didn't want to," the boy replied em phatically.

"Why," the mother asked, studying his face wit the peculiar searching glance that sometimes provoke him and sometimes filled him with a desire to bury hi head in her lap and weep.

"Why should I," Keith rejoined. "He was dead!"

VI

NO sooner had the apologetic young man removed the effects of his departed relative than Keith wanted to take full possession of the parlour. His mother checked his eagerness with the explanation that they might still want to rent it. In the meantime he could use it freely, but he must remove all his playthings when he was through for the day.

"Why can't I sleep on the big sofa in there," he asked in a tone that he vainly tried to make ingratiating.

"Not yet," said his mother evasively. "You had better stay in here, I think."

Once more the sense of being watched took hold of him unpleasantly, filling him with a mixture of fear and resentment. And his wonder why they seemed to suspect him added to the mystery with which his mind was wrestling so hopelessly.

The constant access to the parlour was a great change for the better, however, and one of the first uses he made of it was to investigate his father's little library with a thoroughness that until then had been out of the question. It was a queer collection, embracing every form of literature from philosophy to fiction. This catholicity did not mirror the father's

taste but resulted from his manner of acquiring th books. Before obtaining the position he now held the bank, he worked for a while in the office of one the principal book printing establishments at Stoc holm. There he formed acquaintances which later e abled him to get one unbound set of sheets of eve book issued from that press. These he sent to binder who put them into simple paper covers for a fe *öre* per volume. They always arrived in a large pac age just before Christmas, and one of the thorns Keith's flesh was the care with which his father ke all those new treasures hidden until the holiday seaso was past. Then the books that had not been hande on to friends or relations as Christmas presents we given a permament place on the shelves of the boo case. All of them, however, lacked printed cove and illustrations.

The young man whom every one spoke of as "poo dear Herr Stangenberg" had not been dead a wee when Keith one afternoon on his return from scho found himself alone in the house with Granny. Hi mother had gone to call on some friends, and the fa ther would not come home from the bank for severa hours. Even the servant girl was away, which was fact that not immaterially contributed to Keith's sens of security. Granny need not be taken into account.

A long cherished opportunity had arrived at las and he made straight for the book case. It was locke but he knew where to find the key. Its hiding-plac had constituted one of those little domestic pro lems that add zest to an uneventful existence. Ther was also an injunction of long standing against an meddling with the case without permission, but tha

had been a dead letter for some time. When books were concerned, Keith's customary respect for authority ceased to be an obstacle to his desires.

He explored with no special object in mind. He wanted new reading matter, and his curiosity was piqued by a number of books with blank backs that gave no clue to their contents. Two huge, fat volumes on the bottom shelf had already attracted his attention, and they were the first he pulled out. Their title brought instantaneous disappointment—"The Philosophy of the Unconscious," by Edouard von Hartmann. He prepared scornfully to put them back, when, through the big gap left by their withdrawal, he became aware that the space back of the front row was packed with smaller books and pamphlets. This discovery surprised him for a moment, but what he saw in there looked rather uninteresting. Nevertheless he reached in and pulled out a small green pamphlet that happened to be nearest at hand. Idly he glanced at the legend printed on the front cover:

"Amor and Hymen. A guide for married and unmarried persons of both sexes."

The words carried no special meaning to his mind, and in the same indifferent manner he turned a few pages until his eyes fell on a full-page illustration.

After that he read no other book for days.

VII

HE read as he had never read before in his bri span of life—as, perhaps, he would nev read again, no matter how wide a stretch life that span might ultimately encompass.

He read of the anatomical differences between m and women. He read about the mechanism of lov He read about the mysteries of procreation. All it was startlingly new to him, and yet he read with sense of always having known it. He read with a solute acceptance, without a possibility of doubt.

It seemed a genuine revelation that must rend all future questioning futile. And yet he seemed t know no more when he had finished than he knew b fore he started. It remained outside of himself, structure of air, a series of shadowgraphs, and th craving within him burned as passionately as ever.

From now on he could grasp the points of the stori told by the boys at school, and he would know wh Johan was hinting at in his boast about the secret d ings of that attic. But of the reality of the thing knew as little as before. In fact, the principal less brought home by his reading was that here he fou himself in the presence of something that could not learned out of books.

To begin with he did not go beyond the first part the book. This he read over and over again. Wh

at last he was sated with what that part had to give, a subtle chemical change had taken place in his mental make-up, one might say. It was not caused by any facts conveyed by the book. These seemed quite natural to him, and in themselves they would have had no more power over him than the information about flowers of various kinds imparted by the teacher of botany. It was the tone used that affected him in a manner reminding him of the Swedish Punch of which he had tasted a few drops now and then. In every line there was a mixture of shamefaced apology and veiled desire that sent all the blood in his body rushing toward his head until the walls of the room about him reeled. Every inch of him was on fire, and in that flame body and soul were consumed together.

The sum and substance of it was that he had become conscious of that multitudinous impulse we call sex, and that from a vague, restless yearning this impulse suddenly had developed into an appetite as imperative as any hunger for food.

VIII

FINALLY he went on to the remaining chapters of the book, always with that double sense of knowing it all before and of not quite grasping what he read.

Pages were consumed before he realized with a shock more intense than any one previously experi-

enced, that the book was speaking of the game
learned to play back of the big rock

Again it was not what the book told that seemed
matter, but the tone in which it spoke. And while h
fore that tone had sent the blood to his head, it no
drew every drop of it back to his heart until he shiver
and shook with a misery so acute that another m
ment's endurance of it seemed unthinkable.

At that instant fear was born within him. Unt
then it had been no more real to him than were now th
experiences described in the first part of the boo
He had instinctively shrunk from things that he kne
or believed to be painful, from the shock of a blow
the sting of a harsh word. He had suffered discon
forting anticipation of rebukes and restrictions. B
he had never before stood face to face with that sta
unreasoning terror which gathers its chief power fro
the intangible character of the danger it heralds.

He learned that physically and spiritually he ha
courted death, and what is worse than death. An
suddenly the thought of that gentle-faced, sweet-tem
ered young man in the parlour leaped into his memor
But the image it brought him was not that of a huma
form stretched stiffly within the black boards of
coffin. What he saw and what froze him with horr
was the hollow temples and sallow cheeks and droopi
jaws and bent back and trembling limbs of the huma
wreck that was still counted a living man.

Worse than that image, however, and worse tha
any thought of punishment by powers not within h
actual ken, was the book's damning imputation
shame incurred, of unworthiness proved, of inferiori
so deep that no words could adequately picture it.

All that was most himself wanted to rise in wild rebellion against conclusions that found no support in anything he had actually experienced so far. He wanted to refuse belief. He sought for escapes as if the fulfilment of the doom pronounced by the book had been a matter of minutes. But there was the book, and to back it suddenly appeared a line of experiences out of his own life.

Perhaps those who would not let him visit their homes had only too good cause for refusal. Perhaps, after all, it was not his father's position but something about himself that had caused the parents of Harald, of Loth, and now of Murray, to act in exactly the same way. Perhaps Dally had reasons for not letting him become *primus* which, out of his soul's kindness, he never told even to Keith himself. Perhaps the reason why he always felt isolated and out of touch with his schoolmates lay in their instinctive recognition of his real nature. . . .

In the end he replaced the book with a firm determination never to look at it again. But the poison was in his mind, and the book no longer mattered.

IX

THE game learned behind the big rock must never be played again—that much was certain!

But all resolves proved vain. Fight as he may, the end was inevitably the same.

Previously he had been the player, and had thoug no more of it. Now he was being played with, an this new form of the game kept him see-sawing ince santly between ecstasy and agony, between the relief yielding and the remorse at having yielded.

His life was an unending conflict, and in the presen of that ever renewed struggle within, by forces th seemed alien to his own self, all else lost significance

And there was not a thing or a person within reac that could offer an antidote to the self-contempt co roding his soul's integrity.

X

GOING to school grew very hard for a whil He could barely look his schoolmates in th face for fear that they might read in his ey what sort of a chap he was. At times, on his walks t or from school with Murray, a faintness would sei him at the mere thought that his friend somehow migh have guessed the truth. And he sent timidly enviou side-glances at one lucky enough to be raised above a temptation. For neither his recollections of the gan gathered about the big rock nor the more recent ligh shed on such things by Johan had the slightest influen on his conception of himself as the sole black sheep in flock of perhaps soiled but nevertheless washable whi ones.

After a while the poignancy of his emotions becam blunted by familiarity, and mere weariness forced hi

to accept himself on a reduced level. A sort of new equilibrium was established within him, but it was primarily based on indifference. Nothing really mattered. Effort was useless. Things merely happened. No one could help what happened. And in this fatalism, so utterly foreign to his ardent, supersensitive nature, he found a certain momentary sense of peace.

He went about his daily class-room tasks as in a dream, doing mechanically what he was asked, and dropping his effort as soon as the demand for it ceased. Nothing happened during the lessons to indicate that the teachers noticed any change in him or were in any manner dissatisfied with him. Perhaps he was saved by an occasional flaring up of interest that drew from him flashes of that brightness of mind that had won Dally and given him the reputation of an exceptional pupil.

But as the spring term drew nearer its close, he found it more and more difficult to keep up a pretence at attention. More and more he sank into mere drifting, and he whose pride had been really to know, now trusted to luck like any dullard with a head unfit for studying. Worse still and more significant, he began to find excuses for staying home from school. He who had never known what it was to be sick, now developed one disturbing symptom after another—headaches and colds and digestive troubles in endless succession. Most of the time these symptoms yielded quickly at the mere sight of the castor oil which was his mother's favourite remedy and the taste of which Keith hated more than anything else in the world. It was the one thing that stood inexorably between his growing indolence and the luxury of being ill.

With commencement almost in sight, all sorts o written examinations were demanded. These he dis liked additionally because his handwriting never ha developed in proportion to his mental capacity. N matter how he strove, the letters remained childishl awkward. No two of them seemed to point in th same direction. Not even his futile efforts at sing ing could fill him with a more humiliating sense of in feriority.

All his various resistances were brought into con certed action when at last the teacher in Swedish or dered him to prepare two brief original composition on quite simple themes. In the days of Dally he woul have revelled in such a task. Now it appalled him His head was empty. The mere idea of trying t write about such things as the discovery of Americ and the beauties of nature seemed silly. There wa any number of books, besides, that said anything yo could ever hope to say on either subject.

The end of it was that he produced an indisposition real enough not only to convince his mother but t make himself willing to face the ordeal of castor oil Thanks to the oil he was able to stay in bed the bette part of two days. Those were the last two days be fore his Swedish compositions were to be delivered He knew that if they were not delivered, he would ge no mark in that subject, and this would prevent hi graduation to a higher grade.

In that dilemma he conceived the brilliant idea o making his mother write the compositions for him, an he actually succeeded in persuading her to do so. H prompted her a little, but she did the main part of th work, and the handwriting was hers. Finally he go

her to bring them up to school with the explanation that he was too sick to sit up and write, but that she had taken down what he dictated. He did not even look at what she wrote, and it never occurred to him to doubt her ability of doing it far better than he could. When it was all over, he experienced a tremendous sense of relief, and this was much enhanced by his mother's willingness to let the father remain in complete ignorance of what had happened.

Nothing was said to him when he showed up at school again. His first inkling of trouble came with the return of his copy book. It was full of marks and corrections in red ink. As he looked at these in a stunned fashion, he realized for the first time that his mother's spelling and punctuation would have been deemed unsatisfactory in a second grade pupil. At first he did not even consider the bearing of this discovery on his own fate. He could think of only one thing, namely that another blow had been dealt to his conception of his mother as a superior being. He actually felt ashamed on her behalf. Then came the thought of what the teacher must have thought. . . .

Commencement Day brought the answer. He got only C in Swedish, which meant that he had failed to pass. It gave him the choice between spending another year in the same grade or facing special examinations in the fall.

At first he was too dazed to think. Then his former indifference changed into blazing indignation and resentment. He felt himself a victim of unpardonable injustice. In that mood he returned home and reported to his father.

"You talk nonsense, my boy," said his father in a

tone that was new to Keith. "From some things have heard, I gather that your escape from the sam kind of mark in every subject was little short of mirac ulous."

Keith stared open-eyed at his father, puzzled by hi manner of speaking and stung to the quick by what h said.

"What are you going to do now," his father de manded after a while.

A long pause followed during which Keith's brai worked at lightning speed. It was as if he had neve known until then what really had happened during th weeks preceding commencement.

"I'll pass the examinations in the fall," he said a last.

"Will you give me your word of honour to rea hard during the summer," his father asked, and hi voice set the boy's heart throbbing like an engine.

"I will," replied Keith. "But I could pass thos examinations without looking at the book."

"The more shame for you, then, to let yourself b plucked," was his father's concluding remark, but eve that was uttered without a suggestion of bitterness.

XI

THE summer was spent on the mainland oppo site the island where they used to live. H had practically no companionship except tha of his mother. It was very dull, but for the first tim

he seemed to need solitude. He had brought out all his school-books, and he really did a good deal of studying, especially of Latin, which he knew was his weakest point.

At first he felt a slight grudge against the mother. She had disappointed him for one thing, and there was an inclination besides to hold her responsible for his misfortune. By degrees, however, he began to see his own part in its true light, and he wondered how he could have been such a blind fool. It was this understanding that brought him comparative peace and enabled him to work. He had been so harassed by the question of guilt in regard to actions which his own mind would never have classed as wrong that the sense of facing punishment clearly deserved came as a genuine relief.

The monotony of the season was only broken by a visit to the summer home of Aunt Agda at Laurel Grove, where he stayed a whole week and made a lot of friends. She had served with the Wellanders as a nurse girl when Keith was only a baby. Then she was plain Agda, and Keith's mother often spoke of how crazy she had been about him. Then she disappeared, and when the Wellanders next heard of her, she was the wife of a well-to-do retired merchant, to whom she had borne three children while she was merely a servant and his first wife still lived. Keith had often overheard his parents speak of Agda's phenomenal rise with ironic smiles, but he didn't care for anything except her continued inclination to spoil him.

There was a lot of children at Laurel Grove, boys

and girls, and most of them matched Keith in age They took him in, and in that one week he had glimpse of the kind of life he would have liked to live There was in particular one boy, Arnold Kruse, fo whom Keith formed a warm attachment. This feelin was additionally cemented by Arnold's choice of Keit as a confidant. Arnold was in love with the pretties girl in the place, Gurlie Norlin, and so was every othe boy within reach of Laurel Grove. But Arnold wa the favourite, and he told Keith that he and Gurlie ha agreed to wait for each other and to marry as soon a they were of age.

It was like a fairy tale to Keith—a wonderful tal like no one he had ever read. And the most wonder ful thing about it was that it was real, and that he wa permitted to play a sort of part in it. His thought went back to Oscar and what he had told Keith abou the love between Oscar's father and mother. Her was love again, mystically beautiful, so that it brought new light into the faces of those it touched. An Keith's heart grew lonely and wistful within him. Bu strangely enough, he never thought of connecting Arnold's love for Gurlie with what he had read in th book found in his father's book case. That was quit a different thing, he felt.

XII

THE presiding genius of the examinations was Lector Booklund, teacher of Latin in Lower and Upper Sixth. He was short and stocky and gnarled by gout. Instead of speaking, he emitted a series of verbal explosives, and the boy whose answers didn't come quick enough became the object of withering scorn. Most of his life seemed concentrated in his eyes where twinkling merriment and blazing anger alternated with bewildering rapidity. He posed as a tyrant, but the boys who knew him well said that at heart he was as kind as he was just, and that his nervous impatience and bursts of rage were merely the results of severe physical sufferings.

The moment he caught sight of Keith among the boys up for examination, most of whom hailed from other schools, he became interested and began to draw him out. And Keith was able to respond with some of his old-time quickwittedness. His ambition had been stirred into a semblance of life through the shock of his failure, while the summer's rest and peace had brought back some of his natural vivacity. The inner conflict was still a source of trouble, but it did not seem quite so much a matter of life and death. He had not yet passed the crisis, but he had reached a point where a little tactful nursing might put him on the right path

again for good. What he needed above all was en couragement, and that was what he got for a while from the new class principal.

He passed the examinations with ease. Then the sense of being a favoured pupil once more made him throw himself into the studies with considerable zest Little by little, however, his zest slacked off. More and more frequently he became the object of blame or ridicule instead of praise. By and by Lector Book lund found it hard to ask him a question or give him a direction without open display of irritation. It was evident that he felt disappointed in Keith, and he did not hesitate to show it.

Many causes combined to produce the slump in Keith's aspirations that in its turn produced the changed attitude of the teacher. The latter's impa tience had probably as much to do with it as anything else, while his splenetic manners and speech intimidated the boy's already overwrought sensitiveness. The sub jects taught and the form of the teachings did their share, too. Grammar and rules and dry data seemed to play a greater part than ever. In Latin, for instance they were reading Ovid's *"Metamorphoses"* and the colourful old legends might easily have been used to arouse the boy's interest, if attention had merely been concentrated on the stories told and the life re vealed by them. But the teacher was first and last a grammarian, and he would wax frantically enthusias tic over some subtle syntactic distinction which left Keith peevishly indifferent. And Lector Booklund was positively jealous on behalf of his own subject, so that once he flung a bitingly sarcastic remark at the boy

because his attention had flared up at the quoting of a phrase in English.

Keith's progress in English showed that he was still capable of both interest and effort. This language was quite new to him, and the class had it only one hour a week. But the man who taught it had advanced ideas for his day, and instead of boring the boys with a lot of abstract rules relating to a wholly unknown tongue, he let them start right in on one of the English prose classics. They were told to pick out the meaning of the principal words in advance, and the pronunciation was explained as they took turns at reading aloud. All the time the teacher kept the principal part of their attention focused on the story gradually revealed. During that one hour a week Keith's mind never wandered. But it was the only rift in the scholastic fog that kept him in a state of constant boredom.

In the meantime things were happening at home that did not help the situation.

XIII

HE had moved into the parlour at last. It was almost his own room. An old piece of furniture, half wardrobe and half dresser, standing in the vestibule outside the parlour, had been turned over to him for good. His library and his playthings were installed on the shelves in the upper part. His personal things occupied a whole drawer below. At

night he slept on the big sofa, and the door to his parents' room was closed.

One night he lay awake unusually long. The old struggle was going on within him, and there was no peace in sight. His parents had gone to bed a good while ago, and as far as he was concerned just then they had practically ceased to exist.

Then his attention was attracted by a slight noise from their room. The stillness of the night made it audible to him in spite of the closed door. At first he listened out of idle curiosity, and to get away from his own feverish thoughts. Finally he got up without any clear idea of what he was doing, or why he did it. He began to tremble even as he moved on tip-toe across the room. At the door he had to kneel down to steady himself.

He could not tell whether an hour or a minute had passed when he crawled into bed again. His whole body was on fire. He could feel the pulses at his temples hammering. At that moment he knew what passion was. The man in him had been let loose, and he wanted to cry aloud with the bitter-sweet agony of it.

There was no thought of father or mother in his mind. The people back of the door were just a man and a woman. The feelings that surged through his heart, shaking his body volcanically, would have been the same if those two had been perfect strangers.

No jealousy stirred him. No sense of shame shocked him. His dominant emotion was envy.

The visit of death had left him unmoved. Now he had been as close to life in its most intense form, and the effect of it was maddening—a call that seemed to make further waiting worse than death.

He fell asleep at last with a part of the pillow stuffed into his mouth to keep his sobs from being heard in the next room. . . .

XIV

THE thing had him by the throat. It was stronger than any power he could bring to bear against it. Fighting it was useless. Resistance meant merely prolonged torture. Surrender meant sleep—and torture of a different kind the next day.

Once more he managed to get hold of the book that had wrought such disastrous change in his entire existence. He read again the chapters bearing directly on his own case. They seemed more convincing than ever. There could be no doubt of his degradation or his doom.

XV

HE came running home from some errand one evening not long before Christmas. His mind was more at ease than it had been for a long time. That season of the year rarely failed to bring him a little happiness.

The moment he flung open the kitchen door, he knew that something was wrong, and his heart sank within him.

The mother stood in the middle of the floor wringing her hands. Granny sat on the sofa, stolid-faced as usual, and rolled one of her endless bandages. On the chair by the window sat the father, his shoulder against the wall, his left elbow on the table, and his head resting in his left hand.

Keith could hardly believe what he saw.

His father's face was contorted with pain or grief. Big tears rolled down his cheeks and dropped on the table before him. Every little while he was shaken by a sob that almost choked him.

"Is he sick," the boy gasped.

"Something dreadful has happened," the mother stammered, unable to take her eyes off her husband.

"You had better go into the parlour, Keith," whispered Granny as she started on a new roll.

Keith turned his glance once more to the father. He had never seen a man cry before, and until that moment such a lack of control on the part of his father had seemed quite unimaginable. The strangeness of it frightened him.

"I fear it will kill him," he heard his mother mutter.

"I wish it would," the father broke out, raising his head for a moment. "But it won't, Anna. . . . I'll be over it in a minute."

His words were forced out between sobs. Keith saw that he was struggling terribly to get himself in hand.

Then he caught sight of Keith, whose entrance he evidently had not noticed, and as usual the presence of

the boy brought back the self-restraint for which he had been striving vainly until then.

"Keith," he said, speaking much more quietly, "your Uncle Wilhelm has been arrested for using money that didn't belong to him. I can't believe it, but I am sure they will send him to jail. . . . You must always remember what I have told you about money. . . . "

His own words seemed to bring back to him the full horror of the situation, and he threw himself face downward over the table in another convulsive outburst of grief.

Granny on the sofa was signalling frantically to Keith to leave the room. Mechanically he obeyed her. Anything was better than to watch his father. . . .

XVI

LITTLE by little he learned the whole sad story. At the same time he realized that Christmas would probably be spoiled—the one thing he had banked on for momentary relief.

Once upon a time Uncle Wilhelm had been the most prosperous member of the family, owning a big, fine grocery store in the fashionable North End district. He made a lot of money, but his wife was vain and foolish and pleasure-loving. She always managed to spend more than he could ever earn, and he was idiotically in love with her. It ended in bankruptcy. Uncle

Wilhelm got a position as superintendent of a sma factory in the South End. There he might have do very well in a more modest way, had not his wife pr ceeded to turn his life into a perfect hell. This w her way of punishing him for his failure to support h in the style she demanded. He was weak in more wa than one, and soon he drank not merely for the sake a good time, as everybody else did, but to find consol tion and forgetfulness. His private affairs went fro bad to worse. Gradually he lost the habit of disti guishing between his own meagre funds and those e trusted to him. It was a clear case, and his employe proved merciless when it was found out.

What Keith's father had feared came true. An that Christmas was more sad than any other part o any other year had ever been.

XVII

IT would have been hard on Keith at any tim Coming as it did, the family disgrace, which h guessed rather than grasped, and the disappoin ment, which was a depressingly tangible thing, brough his natural sensitiveness to a morbid pitch.

There was one idea that haunted him day and nig —the idea that he belonged to a race doomed in a vance to decay and destruction.

Uncle Wilhelm's case was not an isolated one There was Uncle Henrik, the youngest brother Keith's father, who had gone to the dogs while still

youth, and in a more ignominious fashion, if possible. What was he now but a besotted tramp, begging shamelessly of friend or stranger for a few *öre* with which to buy a brief moment of coarse happiness?

There was Uncle Marcus, the husband of Keith's paternal aunt, who had hurt his leg in a storm and lost his splendid position as chief engineer of the swiftest steamer plying on the Northern route. Now he was disabled for ever, and proud Aunt Brita was at her wit's end to keep the home and the family together.

There were the two half-brothers of Uncle Wilhelm's silly wife—popular and dashing young fellows treading blithely the purple path to destruction. Even Keith's naïve mind had discovered which way they were headed, although his thoughts of them were not free from admiration.

And there were still others. Wherever he turned within the narrowing family circle, he met similar instances of progress in the wrong direction. Some were sinners and some were victims of fate—or seemed so—but it came to the same thing in the end.

"The Wellanders are going," Keith's mother said one day to Aunt Brita when she was too depressed and worried to mind the boy's presence.

"Yes," replied Aunt Brita grimly, "and so is everybody else who ever had anything to do with them. Keith will have to start it all over again from the beginning."

That seemed to settle it for the moment. Of what avail could his own feeble struggles be in the face of an adverse destiny?

He brooded over it, and out of his brooding came resentment, and more and more this resentment turned

against his relatives in a fury of disgust. He had feeling of their having betrayed him. . . .

Now and then, however, one of the expressions use by Aunt Brita would recur to him with a suggestion o quite different possibilities.

"Keith will have to start it all over again from th beginning," she had said.

XVIII

IF he only had some one to talk to. . . .

But he was more lonely than ever. Murra had moved to another part of the city, more i keeping with his father's increasing prosperity, an was now attending a North End school. They ha parted with no more ado than if they had expected t meet the next day again. Now and then Keith though of Murray with a touch of sentimental regret, but i was wearing off.

Johan was still found at the foot of the lane, smok ing and bragging and leering as before. To Keith h had become positively loathsome.

There was no one else in sight—not one boy in th class out of whom Keith might hope to make a friend Leaving other factors aside, his lack of pocket mone was sufficient to keep him apart from the rest. The all had some sort of allowance, however scant, an they took turns treating each other to pastry or cand bought from a couple of old women who brought ba

ketfuls to the school doors during every pause. He had to beg especially for every *öre,* and he couldn't get much at that.

He wore a suit made over by his mother from clothes given to her by a woman of some means with whom she had a slight acquaintance. They had been outgrown by that woman's son, and they had been offered to Keith's mother because they were too good to be thrown away. There was nothing about it to be ashamed of, and the made-over suit was neat enough, though a little awkwardly cut. A couple of years earlier, Keith would have hailed it with delight. Now the wearing of it seemed worse than going about naked. He thought that every one noticed the suit and knew that it was not really meant for him.

He read contempt in every glance, and by degrees he developed a temper that was checked only by the humiliating consciousness of his physical inferiority. After nearly five years in school, he was still one of the smallest boys in height and bodily development, and neither gymnastics nor the military drill that became compulsory in the sixth grade had the slightest effect on him. And, of course, he suffered the more from it because he ascribed his lack of stature and muscle to what he had now begun to think of as his own moral weakness.

A petty quarrel one day brought on another fight with Bauer, and this time right in the class room. They rolled around on the floor between the desks and separated only when some one cried out that Booklund was coming. Keith was thoroughly aware of the fact that his classmates regarded their behaviour as inexcusably undignified in pupils of the Lower Sixth, but

contrary to custom, he didn't care very much. What almost made him cry was that the thought that at the moment of separation Bauer once more was on top of him—just as when their first fight came to an end five years earlier. And then Keith was brought still nearer to tears by his disgusted realization of that infantile tendency to cry in every moment of unusual strain.

But, of course, how could he expect anything else?

His whole bearing changed gradually. The gay forwardness that had caused Dally to make fun of him—and like him, perhaps—was quite gone, but gone too, was the shyness that always had run side by side with it. His most frequent mood was one of irritable rebellion, and in between he would have spells of sulkiness that estranged the teachers and surprised himself in his more wholesome moods. He snarled to his mother, and he would have done so to his father if he had only dared.

The school seemed sheer torture much of the time and all its objectionable features seemed to centre in the Latin. His hatred of that subject approached an obsession. There was no doubt that Lector Booklund could feel it, and every day he watched Keith with more undisguised hostility. At last he could not speak to the boy without losing his temper, and so for days at a time he would not speak to him at all. At such times Keith's state of mind presented a riddle hard to solve. He posed to himself and others as tremendously gratified at being left alone and not having to answer any bothersome questions. Inwardly, however, he was more hurt and offended by that neglect than by any other rebuke the teacher could have devised.

Such a period of suspended communication had

lasted more than a week, when, at the wane of the term, the inevitable explosion finally occurred.

XIX

THE class had just turned in their copybooks with a Latin exercise prepared at home. Lector Booklund was standing at his desk with the whole pile in front of him. Keith's book happened to be on top. The teacher opened it. He sent a glance at Keith that made the boy squirm. Then, as his eyes ran down the page, his face turned almost purple. Suddenly he raised the book over his head and threw it on the floor with such force that the cover was torn off.

A moment of ominous silence followed. Keith was red up to the roots of his hair.

"Wellander," the teacher roared.

Keith rose none too quickly from his seat without looking up.

"Pick up that thing," Lector Booklund shouted at him with the full force of his powerful lungs. "I don't want to touch it again."

Keith remained like a statue, feeling now as if he didn't have a drop of blood left in his whole body.

"Pick it up, I tell you!"

"No," Keith retorted in a strangely self-possessed voice, "you had better pick it up yourself. I didn't throw it on the floor."

In another moment the teacher was beside Keith,

burying his hand in the boy's hair. Then he pulled and shook, shook and pulled, until the hand came away with big tufts of hair showing between the fingers.

Again absolute silence reigned for a moment.

"Ugh," blew the teacher, his anger changed to a look of embarrassment. "I am not going to speak another word to you, Wellander, during the rest of the term. Sit down!"

Instead of sitting down, Keith walked over to the torn copy book, picked it up and turned toward Lector Booklund.

"I am going home," he announced almost triumphantly. "You have no right to hit me or pull my hair out by the roots."

Before the teacher had recovered from his surprise, Keith was outside the door and on his way home.

He didn't know afterwards how he got there, but he could remember saying to himself over and over again:

"I didn't cry and I didn't want to cry!"

XX

HE told his mother truthfully what had happened and declared in conclusion that he would never go back to school again.

She was furious with the teacher and thought that,

on the whole, it would be safer for Keith to stay away during the few weeks remaining of the term.

"That man should be punished," she cried repeatedly. "You did just right."

But the father spoke in another tone when he, in his turn, had heard the tale of that eventful day.

"You will go to school tomorrow as usual," he said in his sternest voice. "You had no right to refuse to pick up the book, and you had no right to leave the school without permission."

"I can't go back after being treated like that, papa," Keith remonstrated, trying vainly to make his tone sound firm.

"You will," the father reiterated, "or I'll. . . ."

He stopped and thought for a minute.

"Or you'll begin to learn a trade tomorrow. Take your choice."

Father and son looked long at each other.

"Carl . . ." the mother began pleadingly.

"Please, Anna," the father checked her. "This is too serious. The boy's future is at stake."

Then he turned to Keith and said more kindly: "I ask you to go for my sake."

"I will," the boy blurted out with a little catch in his voice.

His pride was broken, and once more those everlasting tears were dimming his eyes.

He felt weak and helpless, but through his dejection broke now and then a sense of pleasant warmth. His father had asked him to go "for his sake."

Such a thing had never happened before.

XXI

THE class was discreetly preoccupied when Keith showed up as usual next morning; Only Young Bauer evinced a slight inclination to taunt him, but was curtly hushed up.

During one of the afternoon hours the door of the classroom opened unexpectedly and Keith's father appeared on the threshold.

"Will you pardon me for just one moment, Sir," he said to the astonished teacher. Then, without coming further into the room, he addressed himself to Keith: "I have had a talk with the Rector and with Lector Booklund. I have heard all about your behaviour in school, and I warn you now that unless you do better, I shall give you the treatment you deserve. Bear that in mind."

Then he vanished as abruptly as he had appeared.

A couple of the boys snickered. The teacher rapped sharply on the table with the book he held in his hand.

Keith sat absolutely still with bowed head. He couldn't think. He didn't dare to think of ever facing one of those other boys again. And suddenly it occurred to him that his father had looked quite common, like a workman almost, while he stood there at the door, talking across the room to Keith.

But a tiny voice somewhere within himself denied it.

XXII

THE term dragged to an end.

Commencement Day was no longer a cause of joyful anticipation. It had to be borne like many other things. But it did mark the end.

Keith learned without much heartbreaking that he had got a "C" not merely in Latin, which he expected, but in behaviour as well—he who all through his school period had never had less than "A" on his personal conduct.

Well, it merely clinched the decision he already had formed. One could not pass any examination in behaviour. And after what had happened, the thought of going back to the same classroom in the fall gave him a sensation of outright physical discomfort. Anything was better than school.

Not even his mother had put in an attendance that day. He had to walk home by himself, all the other boys being accompanied by pleased or resigned parents. But it was in keeping with the rest of what he had to go through.

Out of the midst of the shapeless throng of dark thoughts filling his head, a quite irrelevant memory pushed to the front as if in answer to an unspoken question. It consisted of the words spoken by Aunt Brita:

"Keith will have to start it all over again from th beginning."

XXIII

THE first few days after the closing of th school were wonderfully restful. The par ents proved remarkably forbearing. Neithe one spoke a word of reproach. Nothing was sai about the future. It was as if some sort of fear ha checked them.

The home seemed unusually quiet and pleasant There was any amount of time for reading, and no sug gestions were forthcoming as to what should or shoul not be read. Yet Keith remained satisfied only a fe days.

No one knows what might have happened if they ha gone into the country for the summer as they used t do. But again the whole family had to stay in tow for some reason not divulged to Keith. And with th heat and the sunshine came the usual restlessness.

Keith had made up his mind not to go back to schoo He was equally determined not to let himself be force into any sort of manual work. Besides having n knack for it, he had come to look upon it as a socia disgrace. Some other work must be found, for wel enough he knew that his father would not let him sta home indefinitely doing nothing.

It was easy, however, to make up one's mind about what not to do, but mighty hard to discover the right kind of thing to do. Keith had no clue to start with at all, and to begin with all his efforts led him into the blindest of blind alleys.

He plagued his mother with inquiries to which she had few or no answers to give. He even deigned to consult Johan and found that he already had found a place as errandboy in a store. A few questions convinced Keith that such a life might be good enough for Johan but not for a boy who, after all, had reached Lower Sixth in a public school.

The situation was becoming desperate and Keith was watching his father with steadily increasing concern, when at last a helpful hint reached him from the most unexpected quarter.

"Why don't you look in the paper," Granny asked him one day.

"What for," was Keith's surprised counter-question.

"For work, of course. Look at the advertisements on the back page."

"Do you think, Granny. . . ." Keith hesitated.

"I don't think," retorted Granny. "I know."

XXIV

THREE weeks had gone. It was still early morning, and he was studying a newspaper very carefully.

"What is it you find so interesting," his mother asked at last.

"The advertisements," he explained without taking his eyes off the paper.

"What advertisements?"

"Help wanted."

"Nonsense," she cried, putting down her sewing. "Are you still thinking of leaving school?"

"Here is one about a volunteer wanted in a wholesale office," was his indirect reply. "It is on West Long street—in the same house where Aunt Gertrude has her jewelry store. Do volunteers get paid?"

"I don't know," his mother said absent-mindedly, her hands resting on her lap in unwonted idleness. Then she woke up as from a dream: "You should ask papa first."

"What's the use until I know whether I can get it," Keith parried.

Ten minutes later he bustled into Aunt Gertrude's store, where she sat in a corner near the big show-window working at a strip of embroidery that never got finished. She was a spinster with large black hungry eyes in a very white face. She and Keith's mother had been girl friends. Now she was running one of the two jewelry stores owned by her brother.

She had heard of the position. It was in the office of Herr Brockhaus on the second floor—a dealer in tailor's supplies. And she had heard that he was a very nice man.

"Do you think I can get it," Keith demanded eagerly.

"Why don't you run up this minute and ask," she suggested.

Keith looked as if he had been asked to jump off a church steeple. But in another minute he was climbing the stairs. His legs seemed rather shaky and his tongue felt like a piece of wood. The moment he opened the door, however, all his fears and hesitations were gone. Once more he was the old Keith who had made a play of studies and examinations.

Herr Brockhaus was a tall, youngish, good-looking man, a little haughty of mien, but with a tendency to smile in quite friendly fashion.

"I have as good as hired another boy who got here earlier than you," he said in reply to Keith's inquiry. On seeing Keith's dejected look, he laughed good-humouredly.

"There are plenty of other jobs," he suggested.

"But you look as if you would be kind to me and give me a chance to learn," Keith heard himself saying to his own intense astonishment.

"I can see that when you want a thing you want it real hard," Herr Brockhaus rejoined with another pleasant laugh. "Well, I like that. What kind of a hand do you write?"

"Awful," Keith confessed, "but I am going to learn better."

For a good long while Keith felt himself studied from top to toe, and under that searching scrutiny he blushed as usual.

"I am willing to do anything that is required," he ventured to ease the suspense.

"All right—what did you say your name was? Keith—I'll take you, and tell the other boy that I changed my mind. When can you begin?"

"Tod . . . tomorrow," Keith corrected himself with a sudden remembrance of his father.

"Good," said Herr Brockhaus. "Show up at eight And I'll pay you ten crowns a month the first year, al though as a rule volunteers don't get anything."

Keith walked home on air. The sun never shone more brightly than that day. The tall old stone houses along West Long street looked imposing and mysterious, as if they had been magic mansions full of golden opportunities for bright little boys. School seemed years away already. Lector Booklund was a dream.

His mother listened in silence to his wonderful tale. Then she kissed him.

"When you have made a lot of money, will you present me with a new black silk dress," she asked with a suspicious lustre in her eyes.

"Anything you want, mamma," he promised solemnly. "When I begin to make money, you'll never have to worry any more about anything."

Again she had to kiss him.

He was then a little more than halfway through his fifteenth year.

XXV

WHEN his father came home that night Keith hurried across the room to meet him.

"Papa," he cried full of subdued excitement and a swelling of self-importance such as he had not experienced for ever so long. "I have got a job,

"What kind of a job," asked the father quietly.

"In an office." And Keith sputtered out the details.

When the whole story was told, the father stood looking at him enigmatically for a long while.

"Perhaps it is just as well," he said at last. "It certainly will make things easier for me. But bear in mind what I now tell you, boy: you will live to regret the chance you are throwing away—a chance for which I would have given one of my hands when I was of your age."

"Did you want me to go on," Keith asked uncertainly.

"I did—I always hoped that you should pass your university examinations and wear the white cap."

"And what did you want me to become?"

"A civil engineer—that's the only real profession today."

The idea was too novel to be grasped quickly by the boy. His own thoughts had never strayed in that direction, and his conception of an engineer's duties and position was extremely vague.

"An engineer," he repeated. "But then I should not have studied Latin."

"Of course not, but you chose it without asking my opinion first."

Keith's surprise increased.

"Why didn't you tell me," he insisted.

"Because I wanted you to begin to shape your own life," the father replied, "and I thought you knew what you wanted."

Keith could hardly believe his own ears.

"What do you want me to do now," he pleaded at last.

"What you feel you must," rejoined the father. "This concerns your life, and not mine. And you must make up your own mind. Whatever you decide, you have my good wishes, boy, and I shall try to help you as far as I can."

For a moment Keith had a sense of never having known his father before. Then a thought flashed through his head: why did he not speak before?

He went into the parlour and stood at the window staring at the gloomy façade of the distillery across the lane. A motley throng of thoughts chased each other through his brain.

It was not yet too late. Nothing was settled. He could still drop the job and go back to school if he wanted. But did he want it?

The thought of school sent a slight shiver down his spine.

No, he was sick of it, of the teachers, of the tedious books, of the boys who looked down upon him and kept him at arm's length all the time, of everything that had made up his life for the last few years.

He wanted change. He must have it.

Above all else, he wanted to be free, he wanted to do as he pleased, and now he had found a way to it, he believed.

At that moment it seemed to him that his childhood suddenly had come to an end, that his manhood had begun, and that all life lay open before him.

THE END.

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